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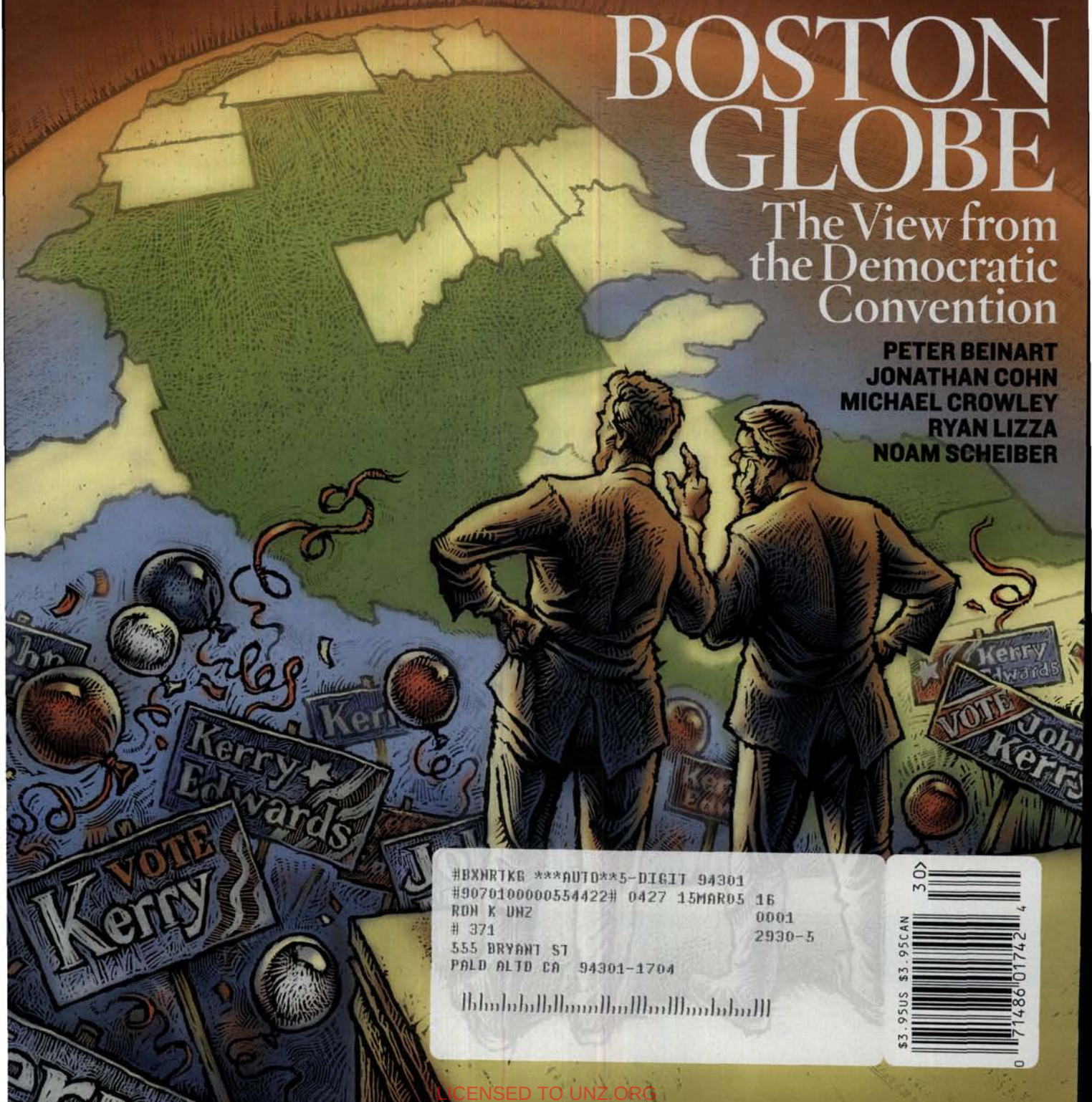
THE NEW REPUBLIC

BOSTON GLOBE

The View from the Democratic Convention

PETER BEINART
JONATHAN COHN
MICHAEL CROWLEY
RYAN LIZZA
NOAM SCHEIBER



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Parents are seizing new opportunities to choose their children's schools through vouchers and charter schools. But does such school choice improve learning and lead to other improvements in schooling? The evidence from a variety of studies shows that it does.

Analyses of student achievement indicate that school choice leads to higher levels of learning in various parts of the United States and other countries. Better studies show stronger and more consistent effects, and no study points to substantially poorer performance of choice schools.

Surveys show that parents most often choose private and public charter schools with academic standards superior to regular public schools. Parents are as adept as education experts in evaluating the academic offerings. To meet parents' desires for such offerings, charter schools are expanding their numbers and enrollments.

Required new achievement reporting in all 50 states helps parents pinpoint failing schools and choose the best school for their children. Unlike regular schools, moreover, schools of choice that fail to attract parents must close, which leaves the successful schools of choice to prosper and further enlarge opportunities.

In geographic areas with larger numbers of schools of choice, regular public schools achieve more, have higher graduation rates, and cost less than regular schools in other similar areas with little choice. The positive effects of competition are also notable in metropolitan and urban areas containing multiple school districts that consistently outperform areas with a single monopolistic school districts such as Los Angeles and New York City. The poor performance of public schools, particularly in such large districts, is attributable to unwieldy and wasteful central bureaucracies that are inherently less sensitive to parent concerns and preferences.

School choice is also effective among special-needs students with physical and mental problems such as those in Florida's McKay Scholarship program. More than 90 percent of parents of McKay children were satisfied with their chosen schools, far more than other parents of other special-needs students in nonchosen schools. Depending on their own preferences, McKay parents can choose between schools that focus on a particular disability or schools that integrate children with and without disabilities. Parent surveys also show that McKay students suffer far less harassment and physical attacks than their peers attending nonchosen public schools.

Massively increased choice and resulting competition improve schooling correspondingly. In contrast to the relatively small scale of present U.S. choice programs, Sweden, perhaps surprisingly, provides an excellent example. In 1993, the Swedish government required that all school districts fund schools of choice at a per-student rate of 85 percent of the per-student cost of regular public schools. Tuition charges were eliminated, new educational standards established, and an open admission policy accepted students of varying ability, ethnicity, and socioeconomic level. **Sweden's nationwide choice program was a rousing success in terms of achievement and parental satisfaction.**

Parents have the incentives and information to choose schools for their children just as they choose their names, food, and physicians. There seem to be no good reasons why they cannot and should not choose their children's schools.

—Herbert J. Walberg

Herbert J. Walberg is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution; a member of Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education; and University Scholar and research professor emeritus of education and psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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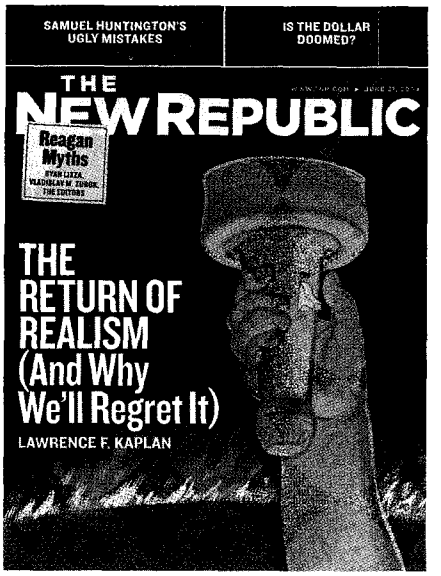
CORRESPONDENCE

REAL WORLD

We welcome Lawrence F. Kaplan's admission that realism is ascendant because it shows how the debacle in Iraq has undermined the neoconservative claim that "imposing" democracy on the Middle East is the only way the United States can win the war on terrorism ("Springtime for Realism," June 21). Unfortunately, Kaplan's lament contains errors. First, he assumes that all critics of the Iraq war are realists. In fact, many non-realists opposed the war and a number of non-realists signed the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy's Statement of Principles. Also, certain individuals whom Kaplan describes as realists (G. John Ikenberry, Senator John Kerry, Charles Kupchan) do not fit that label. In short, people of many different persuasions recognize that President Bush's commitment to the neoconservative agenda has seriously damaged America's national interests.

Second, it is not clear if Kaplan realizes just how bankrupt the neoconservative program has become. He still seems to think it is possible to spread democracy in the Middle East by force even though Bush just botched the job in Iraq. But Kaplan is wrong. In their zeal for imposing democracy, the neoconservatives overlooked nationalism, the most powerful political ideology in the world. As the Soviets discovered in Afghanistan, the Israelis discovered in Lebanon, and we are now discovering in Iraq, it does not take long to go from liberator to occupier, and occupiers usually face nationalist insurgencies that are extremely hard to defeat. Kaplan's prescriptions are unrealistic for another reason: Creating democratic governments in countries that have never known democracy is an enormously complicated task. Imposing democracy by force is an even more daunting challenge. We have no good theories that explain how to do it, and our past efforts at this sort of social engineering were mostly failures. We are flying blind, and failure is to be expected.

Finally, trying to create democracies by conquering or coercing states in the Middle East will make our terrorism problem worse, not better. Increasing the U.S. military presence in the region will stir up nationalism and make people in the countries we occupy eager to throw us out. Terrorism is the best weapon the weak have for resisting the mighty, which is why the Iraqi insurgency is using it. Remember that there were no Iraqi terrorists targeting Americans before we invaded; now there are many. Foreign occupation does not eliminate terrorism; it causes it. It follows that the United States can ameliorate its terrorism problem by reducing its military presence in the Middle East. We should act like an offshore balancer in the region, as we did during the cold war. There is no reason to station large U.S. forces in places like Saudi Arabia and Iraq, especially now that the Soviet threat has disappeared. We can keep our forces over the horizon (as we did with the Rapid Deployment Force) and bring them into the region if our vital interests are threatened. If we continue to maintain a large military footprint in the Middle East, and use it to impose our vision of society upon others, our terrorism problem will only get worse.


SAMUEL HUNTINGTON'S UGLY MISTAKES
IS THE DOLLAR DOOMED?
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Reagan Myths
THE RETURN OF REALISM (And Why We'll Regret It)
LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER
CHRISTOPHER A. PREBLE
STEPHEN M. WALT
Members
Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy
Washington, D.C.

LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN RESPONDS: John J. Mearsheimer, Christopher A. Preble, and Stephen M. Walt of the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy make some fine and important points. Alas, they have nothing to do with my article. They object at length to the practice of "imposing democracy by force." As it happens, my article amounts to a brief against imposing democracy by force. It argues that the United States should rely more heavily on tools like public diplomacy, financial aid, and diplomatic pressure—a point the authors, in their haste to conflate war and democracy promotion, don't bother to address. As for the fiction that I "assume all critics of the Iraq war are realists," I have spent enough time writing about and debating liberal critics of the war to know otherwise. I am hardly alone in describing John Kerry as a foreign policy realist. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic Monthly,* and numerous other publications have done the same—as has the candidate himself. For those wondering whether the label applies to G. John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, I recommend Kupchan's aptly titled *The End of the American Era* and Ikenberry's jeremiads against the "Wilsonian" strain in U.S. foreign policy, spelled out best in the summer 2004 issue of *Survival* magazine. ■

Please address letters to Correspondence, **The New Republic**, 1331 H Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005; letters may also be sent electronically to letters@tnr.com. All letters should include the writer's full name, address, and telephone number; be typed double-spaced; and be fewer than 200 words. Letters may be edited for space and clarity. Please do not send letters via fax.

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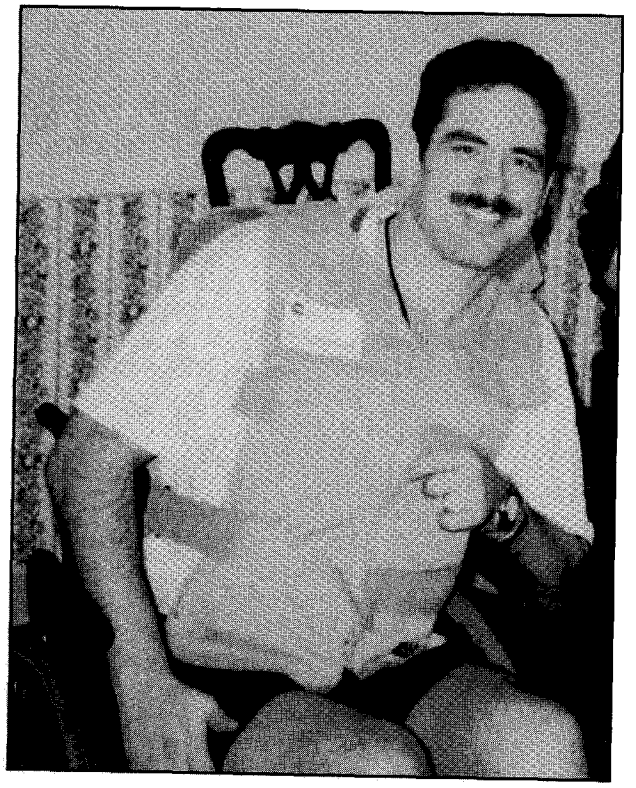
JUSTICE FOR ALL?

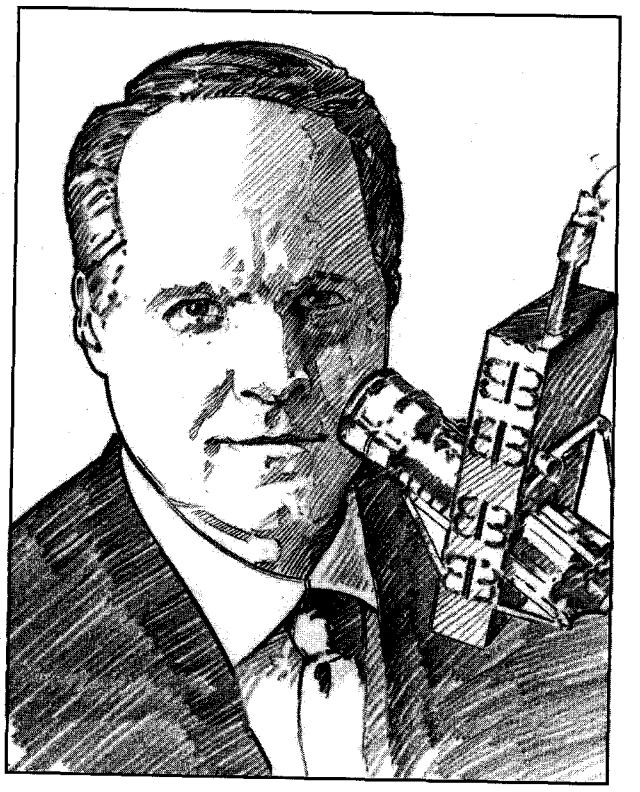


Richard Paey

25 YEARS

As Richard Paey sits in his cell, wheelchair bound, a subdermal pump delivers a steady flow of morphine to kill the back pain from a 1985 car crash. The 45-year-old father of three used to handle the pain with prescription narcotics, but when he moved to Florida he couldn't find a doctor willing to prescribe the appropriate amount of medication. They feared a loss of license or even prison. Like so many others, Paey was forced to use questionable prescriptions and got arrested. He refused to be forced into treatment for addiction because he's a legitimate pain patient. Now the state is providing his narcotics, along with room and board, at a cost to the taxpayers of perhaps $80,000 a year.

"Write a prescription, go to jail. Doctors get sued for overtreating pain, for undertreating pain...and they can get prosecuted for the overdoses of patients."
-Roanoke Times, 23 May 2004



Rush Limbaugh

TREATMENT

When Florida narcotics officers busted talk show host Rush Limbaugh for buying large quantities of Oxycontin and other narcotics on the black market, he checked himself into a treatment center. After five weeks of rehab, he is back on the air. Mr. Limbaugh's illegal drug buys, over 90 pills a day at one point, make Richard Paey's pale by comparision. And while Mr. Limbaugh's use of narcotics began with severe back pain, he continued using long after the pain was gone. To catch addicts like Mr. Limbaugh, the government is targeting doctors, and the doctors are becoming so gun-shy they don't want to risk dealing with chronic pain patients at all.

NEITHER SHOULD BE PUT IN PRISON.

Pain patients and addicts need medical help, not confinement

CommonSenseDrugPolicy.org, Mike Gray, Chair; Robert Field, Co-Chair
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United Appeal

TRB FROM BOSTON

JOHN KERRY IS A LUCKY MAN. The Democratic Party's extraordinary unity gives him a freedom past Democratic nominees could only have dreamed of. He can tell the delegates assembled in Boston that he disagrees with them on this year's biggest foreign policy issue (Iraq) and this year's biggest cultural issue (gay marriage)—and they keep on smiling. He can script a convention that denies delegates what they love most—lusty attacks on George W. Bush—and they don't flinch. Over the past several months, as President Bush has tried to rally his base with issues like the Federal Marriage Amendment, thus forfeiting once and for all his reputation as a compassionate conservative, Kerry has been able to focus on the center, secure that his base will energize itself. No recent Democratic nominee has had it so easy.

Which raises an intriguing question: Why are Democrats so united? The conventional answer is simple: They hate President Bush. But that can't be the whole explanation. Democrats hated Ronald Reagan, too, yet they weren't nearly this unified in 1984. In the '80s, ideological divisions within the party ran too deep to be easily papered over—fear and loathing of Reagan notwithstanding. The reason Democrats are so unified today, then, isn't simply the depth of their disagreements with the president; it's the shallowness of their disagreements with one another. Democrats simply don't care as much about the issues that have, in the past, torn them apart. And one big reason is September 11.

To say national security has united Democrats may sound odd, given that the party split over the war in Iraq. And indeed, during the primaries, Iraq did sow divisions within Democratic ranks. But, over the past six months, the Iraq debate has become less about the war itself than about the postwar. By harshly criticizing the administration's handling of the occupation, Kerry has been able to reconcile himself with his party's base. If Howard Dean or other antiwar Democratic leaders were demanding that the United States quit Iraq, perhaps that divide might resurface. But, since they have basically embraced Kerry's position that we can't abandon Iraq until it is stable, the party's Iraq division is largely fading into the distance.

And, in more subtle ways, the country's new focus on national security has overshadowed many of the divisions that plagued the party in the past. First, it has kept Democrats from splitting over the culture war. In the '80s, Democrats, unlike Republicans, had the burden of representing both blacks and whites at a time of inflamed racial passions. The 1984 and 1988 conventions were dominated by worries about how to mollify Jesse Jackson while dodging racially coded GOP accusations that the Democrats were soft on welfare and crime. When Jackson was calling the Democratic Leadership Council the "Southern white boys club," moving to the center had a racial subtext that made it far more controversial within the Democratic Party than it is today. When Al Sharpton tried to reignite the African American–New Democrat battle this year, he failed utterly.

Partly, race plays a smaller role in presidential politics today because welfare reform, and the drop in violent crime, has made two of the most racially coded issues less politically salient. But the war on terrorism has also played a role. While September 11 may have increased Americans' suspicion of immigrants, it has brought black and white Americans closer—particularly given the large number of African Americans serving in Iraq. Before September 11, it was unthinkable that Rudy Giuliani—widely loathed by African Americans—could become a symbol of unity in New York. But he did, because, after an attack on U.S. soil, racial division over squeegee men seemed petty. When voters, white and black, are asked what they care most about today, almost no one mentions issues like crime, welfare, or affirmative action. And, since those issues bitterly divided largely white, often Southern, New Democrats from black liberals in the '80s, their decline has left Democrats far more united.

But the culture war isn't only about race; it's also about religion. Earlier this year, the Bush campaign tried to insert gay marriage into the presidential debate in the hope that it would divide culturally liberal Democrats from their blue-collar, culturally conservative cousins—much as George H.W. Bush did with the Pledge of Allegiance in 1988. But, while the issue has resonated with Bush's evangelical base, it seems to have failed to cleave off the Rust Belt, largely Catholic, ethnic Democrats Bush was aiming for. As with race, most Americans are simply unwilling to go to war over culture at a time when they really are at war overseas. The reduced salience of gay marriage helps Democrats, because it makes it easier for Kerry to take a position (against gay marriage) that reassures swing voters but differs from his party's base. If September 11 hadn't happened, it's easier to imagine the issue publicly splitting Democrats in the city that gave gay marriage its greatest boost.

Finally, September 11 has undermined one more issue that seemed set to split Democrats in the 1990s: globalization. In the late '90s, anti-globalization sentiment was migrating from the far left into the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. NAFTA had badly split pro-business and pro-labor Democrats, and the Clinton administration's pro-globalization policies formed the centerpiece of Ralph Nader's charge that Democrats had sold their souls to corporate America.

Had globalization issues grown more prominent, with liberals trying to bring Naderites back into the fold by adopting stridently anti-free-trade policies, it's possible Democrats could have spent their 2004 convention at each other's throats. But today, although those divisions still exist, they have been overshadowed by the war on terrorism and are thus far easier to paper over. As with gay marriage, Kerry is probably out of step with most Democratic delegates on free trade. But, after September 11, trade agreements simply aren't uppermost on delegates' minds.

Many commentators have noted—rightly—that, if Kerry is elected and forced to make controversial decisions about Iraq, civil liberties, and the budget, Democratic unity may fray. But it's at least possible that, if the war on terrorism keeps overshadowing globalization and the culture war, Democrats could remain relatively united even as they begin exercising power. And, for Democrats assembled this week in Boston, that truly is reason to celebrate. **PETER BEINART**

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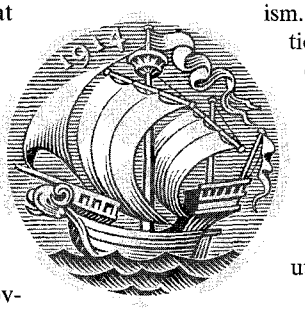
The Black Book

IS THERE ANY accomplishment more rare or more precious in contemporary Washington than to defeat politics? Sometimes there seem to be no Americans in the capital, only Republicans and Democrats. So it is a measure of the 9/11 Commission's achievement that its report has so far frustrated, and even embarrassed, the attempts to politicize it. Of course, who in good conscience, which party, which president, can find vindication in the story of the years leading up to that lucky day for evil? Osama bin Laden's murderers succeeded on George W. Bush's watch, and the national security policies of the United States on September 11, and, more specifically, its policies on terrorism, had been the work also of the Clinton administration, during which the World Trade Center was also attacked. There is no glory in this tale. It is the Black Book of American Security.

The report is certainly the most riveting book ever to have been published by the United States government. Its narrative portions—the steady and sedulous accounts of the course of the conspiracy and the attacks—are novelistically intense. It is hard to read these pages without leaving the realm of policy for the realm of grief. For example:

> At 9:00 AM, Lee Hanson received a second phone call from his son [aboard United flight 175]:
>
> "It's getting bad, Dad. A stewardess was stabbed. They seem to have knives and Mace. They said they have a bomb. It's getting very bad on the plane. Passengers are throwing up and getting sick. The plane is making jerky movements. I don't think the pilot is flying the plane. I think we are going down. I think they intend to go to Chicago or someplace and fly into a building. Don't worry, Dad: If it happens, it'll be very fast. My God, my God."

The precision of the report also chills the reader's blood: "United 175 was hijacked between 8:42 and 8:46, and awareness of that hijacking began to spread after 8:51." The devil really is in *these* details. And the footnotes give evidence not only of extraordinary investigative diligence, but also of a wider scholarship not usually associated with the grinding of government panels. Here are Lee Hamilton and Thomas Kean drawing, for the purpose of historical understanding, upon Henri Pirenne!



The policy recommendations in this indispensable tome show the signs of their committee origins: They seem a little platitudinous and do not reflect the intensity of the Commission's chronicle itself. We argued last week in favor of the Commission's proposal to create a new Cabinet-level director of national intelligence (see "Spy v. Spy," August 2), and we believe the Commission's other recommendations are also worthy of serious consideration and prompt implementation. But even we must admit that there is something a little dispiriting about responding to this grave crisis with another bureaucratic reorganization. No, the most significant service that the 9/11 Commission has performed may have nothing to do with policy at all.

What this report has furnished the American people is a clarification of history. Its account of the ideology of Osama bin Laden and the rise of Al Qaeda is reliable, calm, and admirably free of anxiety about the sensitivities of, well, anybody. Consider these sentences from the section called "Defining the Threat":

> But the enemy is not just "terrorism," some generic evil. This vagueness blurs the strategy. The catastrophic threat at this moment in history is more specific. It is the threat posed by *Islamic* terrorism. ... [This] is not a position with which Americans can bargain or negotiate. With it there is no common ground—not even respect for life—on which to begin a dialogue. It can only be destroyed or utterly isolated.

This could not be more lucid or more correct.

If Americans really want to scare themselves with their summer reading, they should read this book. It is their civic responsibility to know the truths that it contains, not least so they can judge what will be done to those truths in the ruthlessness of the 2004 campaign. ■

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NOTEBOOK

Terry McAuliffe Touts His Success . . . Teresa Heinz Kerry, Simply the Best?

MCAULIFFE'S MOMENT?

THERE'S NO QUESTION THAT THE early part of this week, before John Kerry and John Edwards arrived at the convention, belonged to Terry McAuliffe. McAuliffe pranced into a luncheon with print journalists Sunday clad in a navy blue suit and gold donkey cufflinks, announcing he has been working a punishing schedule. He was recently up at the crack of dawn for a five-mile "run against Bush." By his own count, he managed to give 18 speeches on Saturday. Monday, he says, *Washington Post* Style section writer Mark Leibovich will be tailing him for yet another 22-hour day. His toothy grin reveals that he's enjoying every minute of it.

Truth be told, McAuliffe has a lot to beam about. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) is debt-free for the first time in a century, according to the chairman, and sitting on a $60 million war chest. Under McAuliffe's leadership, the DNC has compiled a 170 million–name voter file, which it used to send out 75 million fund-raising solicitations, compared with a mere 10 million during the entire 1990s. And, as a result of McAuliffe's decision to accelerate the primary schedule, the party settled on its nominee by March. That allowed the lucky winner to focus on raising money and airing commercials instead of being preemptively "defined" by the White House. "My biggest fear in 2001 was the springtime period in '04," McAuliffe says. "They wanted to do to us what we did to Dole in '96. . . . [But] we've won the springtime period."

Not that McAuliffe feels he has to be gracious in victory. At times, the luncheon is more like an extended "I told you so"—one aimed squarely at Adam Nagourney of *The New York Times*. "As many of you know, I took a lot of grief for changing the [primary] calendar," McAuliffe reminds his audience, flashing a mischievous look in Nagourney's direction. "After 2002, a certain newspaper bashed me," he says, clearly referring to a piece in which Nagourney skewered him for his overconfident predictions in the run-up to the midterm election. "At the end of 2000, a lot of people said the party was in trouble," McAuliffe complains a third time. "After 2002, a lot of people wrote that again—Adam." The ribbing is good-natured—more playful than bitter. But McAuliffe clearly knows he's had something to prove these last few years, and he's determined to score a few debater's points now that he thinks he has.

John Kerry

But has he? It's not clear how many of the DNC's recent successes are a result of the chairman's strategic decisions instead of, say, dumb luck. The accelerated primary schedule allowed Kerry to fill his campaign coffers much earlier than would have been possible otherwise. But Kerry wouldn't be in anywhere near the financial shape he's in today had he not opted out of the public campaign finance system during the primaries. And that decision was driven by Howard Dean, not Terry McAuliffe. Dean led the way by opting out of the system; Kerry followed suit when Dean was on the verge of knocking him out of the race.

Likewise, it's not clear how much the DNC's and the Kerry campaign's fund-raising successes are due to McAuliffe's infrastructure improvements. The far simpler explanation is that nearly half the country despises George W. Bush and that many of these people are kicking Terry McAuliffe or John Kerry a $50 check every time Bush does something they deem despicable. Combine that energy with the ease of donating on the Internet—the *Post* reported Saturday that the Kerry campaign is raising more than $10 million per month via the Web—and McAuliffe's version of events sounds a little overstated.

And, of course, all the happy talk will be utterly meaningless if Kerry doesn't win in November. As Nagourney pointed out in response to one of McAuliffe's jabs, "It's still early." It wouldn't be the first time McAuliffe's chest-thumping was premature.

SPEAK NOT

GOP OFFICIALS DON'T SEEM TOO bothered by presidential son Ron Reagan's address to the Democratic convention. They're clearly more troubled, however, by the fact that Reagan's mother, Nancy, apparently won't be speaking at theirs. It's no secret that Mrs. Reagan is dismayed by Bush's restrictions on embryonic stem-cell research, which holds enormous promise. Of course, researchers admit the near-term potential of stem cells for Alzheimer's patients like Ronald Reagan is quite

DAVID COWLES

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limited. But Mrs. Reagan doesn't seem to care: "I do not expect her at our convention," Republican Chairman Ed Gillespie told reporters in Boston Tuesday.

Gillespie, however, didn't want to leave reporters with the impression that Mrs. Reagan was boycotting the convention over stem cells. Instead, he cast her as a traumatized old widow. "Let's be a little thoughtful here," the GOP chairman lectured inquisitive reporters. "Mrs. Reagan's been through a lot this year. And whether she determines she wants to come to our convention this year is Mrs. Reagan's decision, and no one else's."

Nancy Reagan is undoubtedly in mourning. But that wasn't enough to keep her from speaking this week at the public christening of an aircraft carrier named after her husband. Sure, a national convention is a much bigger ordeal than that. But we have a feeling that's not what's going on here—and Gillespie knows it.

POLITICALLY INCORRECT

If Ron Reagan's speech was heavy on empirical evidence and inspiration, we sure didn't notice it. That's probably because we were so distracted by the speech's disingenuous opening. "A few of you may be surprised to see someone with my last name showing up to speak at a Democratic convention," Reagan began. "Let me assure you, I am not here to make a political speech, and the topic at hand should not—must not—have anything to do with partisanship."

But, of course, Reagan *was* making a political speech: The Democrats wouldn't have invited him if they didn't think his presence would score political points against Bush, and Reagan surely wouldn't have lent his good name to the Democrats if he didn't think Bush was a bad president for a host of reasons, including his stand on stem-cell research. Indeed, Reagan's speech was hardly devoid of political barbs. In November, he told the hall, "we can choose between the future and the past, between reason and ignorance, between true compassion and mere ideology." Gee, we wonder why he said that. Do you think it had anything to do with Bush's purported "compassionate conservatism"?

SANDY'S GHOST

Sandy Berger's pilfering of top-secret documents from the National Archives haunts this Democratic convention for several reasons. One is that the platform's foreign policy plank was crafted partly by him. Another is that Berger, one of John Kerry's most trusted advisers on national security issues, left the party's nominee completely in the dark about the fact that he has been under criminal investigation by the Justice Department and the FBI since early fall 2003. Other embarrassments emerge virtually every day. One story in *The New York Times* emanating from the 9/11 Commission report reveals that, in 1998, a fully rehearsed CIA plan—with a high expectation of success—to kidnap Osama bin Laden was ditched because Berger "worried about what would be done ... if he was captured. ... There was a danger of bringing him back to the United States only to have him acquitted." Berger's fret is emblematic of the fact that many voters believe the Democrats see terrorism as merely a violation of the law, under which every terrorist must have his day in court. If Kerry is to win, he must persuade the electorate that this is not his view.

RADIO FREQUENCY

The 35 credentialed bloggers here may be getting all the media attention, but they're greatly outnumbered by the talkers. More than 130 talk-radio shows are broadcasting from the convention this week—quadruple the number that showed up at the Democratic convention in Los Angeles four years ago.

On the ground level of Boston's FleetCenter, right where the commuter trains normally disgorge their passengers, Ed Schultz is doing his show from three o'clock to six o'clock every afternoon. One of the new breed of liberal talkers, Schultz, who's based in Fargo, North Dakota, is now heard on over 30 stations. "If we keep up this pace, we'll break Limbaugh's record of fifty-four stations in his first year," Schultz says.

On his first day broadcasting from the convention, Schultz spent most of his show taking calls about Teresa Heinz Kerry's off-color remark to a Pittsburgh newspaper reporter (people mostly thought it paled in comparison to Cheney's f-bomb on the Senate floor), Iraq, and recommendations for good steakhouses in Boston. When he wasn't taking calls, he was interviewing a stream of Democratic politicians who stopped by his booth. "Our access is very good," Schultz boasts.

Just how good was evident earlier in the day, when Schultz was invited to address a breakfast meeting of Democratic senators—including Tom Harkin, Debbie Stabenow, and Jon Corzine—and their supporters. Talking after his speech, Schultz displayed a touch of humility. "I'm a talk-show host," he went on. "I don't have any delusions of grandeur. I don't think I'm an integral part of the convention." But the Democratic senators who invited Schultz to address their gathering and the politicians who stream to his broadcasting location—"we'll have Daschle," he says, "we'll have Kennedy, we'll have all of 'em on this week"—clearly disagree.

CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

Protestors at the convention are angry that they have been relegated to a "free-speech zone" located well away from the FleetCenter. But leave it to Lyndon LaRouche supporters to come up with an ingenious way to attract the attention of delegates and the press. Monday morning on the T, a group of LaRouchies commandeered an Orange Line subway car and took full advantage of their captive audience. As several LaRouchies—at least one of whom sounded as if she'd had opera training—sang a song that went, "If the Democrats are to win, they must bring LaRouche in," two young LaRouche supporters harangued passengers and passed out literature. "It's all about LaRouche," said one of them as she distributed flyers. Alas, the LaRouchies didn't seem to be making much of an impact. At Back Bay station, a woman exiting the train turned to her friend and asked, "Were those people supporting Kucinich?"

ANNALS OF POOR MUSIC SELECTION

Who picked "Simply the Best" as Teresa Heinz Kerry's theme song? Does the haughty Heinz Kerry really need to be introduced with the sentiment, "She's simply the best, better than all the rest"? Why not just add, "And richer than you"? ■

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Inside the Kerry rewrite operation.

Scrub In

BY RYAN LIZZA

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

CLOSE TO MIDNIGHT on Monday, less than hour after Bill Clinton made his effortless, passionate, mesmerizing case for John Kerry—a feat that seems to flummox so many others—Kerry's senior advisers sent out an urgent request for aides to dig up video of all of Clinton's convention speeches. Kerry had the tapes at his suite in Philadelphia, where he was campaigning, by Tuesday. His aides say this was just part of a general review of convention addresses, designed to help him get a better sense of pacing and timing. "It was all for staging, not for anything beyond that," said a senior aide. But other Democrats scratched their heads, wondering if Clinton's stellar performance had spooked the campaign and sent them scrambling to try to pick up some last-minute nuggets from the master's greatest hits.

But what's important about this story isn't whether the campaign's spin was true, but that the campaign doesn't want you to read about it. In Boston this week, if it doesn't have to do with the word "strength," the Kerry campaign won't talk about it. "No process stories," protested an aide when asked about the stealth Clinton tapes. "They don't want people to know about this," agreed a Democratic operative.

Like every campaign, Kerry-Edwards wants to stick to its message, not cater to the journalistic fetish for behind-the-scenes reports like those about the Clinton tapes—process stories that dilute the favored story line. Political consultants call this "message discipline," and it has emerged as the yardstick by which to judge the health of a modern campaign. Political reporters, who supposedly recoil at scripted politics, nonetheless reward campaigns that are successful at staying on message (think about the admiring coverage of the almost robotically disciplined Edwards campaign) and disparage those that go "off message" (think about the disdainful coverage of Howard Dean as his candidacy imploded). Message discipline reaches new extremes during a convention. And the Kerry campaign's efforts to control what comes out of every speaker's mouth or appears on every delegate's sign is, in many ways, the story of this one. "There's some silliness about all the reporting about the policing of the message," says Carter Eskew, one of the Democratic Party's most respected media gurus. "There's nothing new about that. That's what a convention *is*."

JOE HEROUN

MOST OF THE message-management takes place in a cinderblock-walled bunker behind the main podium. In a poorly lit space known as the boiler room, roughly a dozen Democratic staffers sit at shaky folding tables amid a crisscross of duct-taped wires. Although they prefer to be called speechwriters, aides to the politicians whose text they review dub them "the scrubbers." Rather than stylists hired to inject a little Churchill into the convention, the team's first priority is to enforce Kerry's public plea that speakers refrain from attacking the president and not stray from the campaign's key points about Kerry. "We have to cut back the length of the speeches and tell them they can't launch harsh attacks," says a scrubber. Says another: "Sometimes, it's telling people who think they're speaking [for] five minutes that they're only speaking [for] three minutes. Other times, it's telling people who really want to stick it to Bush that they can't."

The convention speakers who come for review before the young scrubbers fall into a few categories. There are the good soldiers who understand the process and barely need to be vetted. Al Gore falls into that category. The first version of his speech was drafted by "West Wing" writer Eli Attie, but Gore and his aides, using a whiteboard and Magic Marker to outline ideas, stayed up until five o'clock Monday morning revising it, causing some initial nervousness among Kerry aides. "There was some anxiety and Kabuki about when we were going to show them the speech," says Eskew, one of Gore's writers. But, despite his withering attacks on President Bush over the last year, for the convention, Gore wrote a gracious, on-message speech, even pasting in Kerry campaign boilerplate—"I firmly believe America needs new leadership that will make us stronger at home and respected in the world"—without instructions from the scrubbers. Dean, another of the party's best Bush-bashers, was also praised by scrubbers as someone who worked hard at making sure his speech met the Kerry campaign's specifications.

But not everyone submitted such clean copy. According to boiler-room operatives, the two Democrats whose partisan attacks were most eyebrow-raising were, not surprisingly, Terry McAuliffe and Ted Kennedy. McAuliffe's job as party chairman, after all, is to attack Bush, and the scrubbers had to drastically tone down his speech. "They took all the red meat out," says one message cop. Both McAuliffe and Kennedy took the suggestions in stride.

The speaker universally described as the least willing to make changes was Jimmy Carter, who was determined to

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speak his mind about his belief that Bush has misled the country and isolated the United States from its allies. "What he delivered was a lot more positive than the early drafts," says a senior Kerry aide who reviewed Carter's handiwork. "We wanted him to talk about issues and be less negative." A scrubber adds, "He was extraordinarily unamenable. We couldn't change anything."

THE MESSAGE CONTROL extends to the delegates, too. Something as simple as a handwritten sign can set off alarm bells at a modern convention. Delegates are asked to wave only officially approved signs, which are disbursed with military precision on the convention floor by Democratic aides. For delegates and other surrogates who may get questions from the media, the Kerry campaign passes out two-sided laminated cards. On the front is the core message for each day of the convention (Monday: The Kerry-Edwards plan for America's future; Tuesday: A lifetime of strength and service; Wednesday: A stronger, more secure America; Thursday: Stronger at home, respected in the world). On the back are four paragraphs of campaign clichés. ("A strong team with the right plan for America. John Kerry is a dedicated combat veteran. ... John Edwards has spent his life standing up against powerful interests. ... Together, they will make health care affordable and accessible for all Americans, create and keep jobs in America, make us independent from Mideast oil, and restore America's respect in the world.")

For the press, the Kerry campaign organizes numerous opportunities to hear senior aides repeat these bullet points ad nauseam. At a breakfast for print reporters, campaign manager Mary Beth Cahill and senior adviser Tad Devine utter the word "strength" so many times that Devine finally cracks up at the absurdity of his own spin. "Strength is the word. I hope I made that clear," he laughs afterward.

All this effort to control the message has its costs. The tighter the Kerry campaign clamps down, the more desperate the press grows for off-message stories, a realization that forms the heart of the strategy of Republican operatives in Boston (see Michael Crowley, "Mirror Image," page 15). Democratic staffers watch in horror as Michael Moore, trailed by a phalanx of news-starved reporters, roams the convention floor like a ticking time bomb on Monday morning. He offers Kerry speech advice, accosts a CNN anchorman, and drops a few f-bombs—enough color to generate dozens of stories and send giddy RNC staffers racing to their keyboards to inject Moore into the convention subplot by spamming reporters with numerous "research briefings" that amount to a greatest hits of dumb things the filmmaker has said.

Surely the sledgehammer approach to delivering Kerry's message contributed to the wall-to-wall coverage (on Fox, in *The New York Post*, on CNN) of photos of Kerry donning a space suit at Cape Canaveral—embarrassing shots in which the senator looked uncomfortable, reminding some of Michael Dukakis's infamous tank photo-op. The space-suit shots, after all, were one of the only off-message stories of the week. "For every Kerry staffer that should get a raise for controlling what the speakers said, someone should get fired for that picture of Kerry in that space suit," says one of the convention's frustrated message strategists. But the Kerry campaign proved agile in responding. Democratic operatives spent the day digging up old footage of President Bush picking his nose, trying to show that Bush, too, could be caught looking odd on camera. They declared a small victory when CNN finally played the nose-picking tape. Not even the scrubbers objected to the retaliatory Bush-bashing. ■

How up-and-comers use Boston.

Star Search

BY NOAM SCHEIBER

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

IT'S THE AFTERNOON before the start of the Democratic convention, and I'm standing in the lobby of the Park Plaza Hotel, the temporary home of New York's Democratic delegation. Around 4:30 p.m., I notice Senator Chuck Schumer, dressed in a blue blazer, khakis, and a red-and-white striped shirt, 15 feet in front of me and fast approaching. He's coming to talk to New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, similarly clad in a blue check shirt, a blue blazer, and khakis—apparently the official uniform of the 2006 New York gubernatorial primary, which both men are expected to contest. Schumer and Spitzer exchange polite hellos that take all of five seconds. Once Schumer moves on, Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion ambles over to the attorney general. "I saw you talking to Schumer," says Carrion, with a mischievous grin on his face. Spitzer breaks into a smile of his own. "Yeah, I was talking to him," he says, while making a melodramatic stabbing gesture toward Carrion's back.

Welcome to the 2004 Democratic convention. All week, pundits have been lamenting the increasing pointlessness of conventions and the attendant decline in network coverage. But there's at least one group of people who still approach the conventions with a real sense of purpose: the dozens of state and local officials hoping to run for higher office. To these politicians, the convention presents a rare opportunity to improve their prospects. In one convenient location, they can size up likely rivals, connect with potential donors, and schmooze party leaders. And, of course, those lucky enough to secure coveted speaking slots get a shot at raising their public profiles substantially—witness Illinois Senate candidate Barack Obama's national debut at this year's convention. For up-and-coming Democratic politicians, such as

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Spitzer, California Treasurer Phil Angelides, and Baltimore Mayor Tom O'Malley, there may be no more important time in a nonelection year than these four days in July.

The Schumer-Spitzer face-off in Boston is a particularly juicy subplot given that each man is vying for the attention of the same donors and party bigwigs. Schumer is one of the first politicians to enter a reception sponsored by New York Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver on Sunday afternoon. The way he works the room is probably best described as deliberate. He quickly finds a top official at the Rochester-based Kodak Corporation and proceeds to catalogue his efforts to get the upstart JetBlue airline to extend service to Buffalo, Rochester, and Albany. Moments later, Schumer is in another conversation, expressing confidence that Yankees pitcher José Contreras (the starter in that evening's Yankees–Red Sox matchup) is much improved since his family arrived from Cuba.

Spitzer arrives at least 15 minutes after Schumer. But, when he does, his relaxed style is in marked contrast to the senator's. He answers a few questions from reporters, then chats breezily with some local officials. All this as Schumer watches intermittently out of the corner of his eye, apparently determined to keep Spitzer within a six-foot radius. After about 20 minutes, Spitzer appears to lose interest in the exercise and leaves to attend the evening's Yankees–Red Sox series finale. "That's the difference," sighs a Spitzer aide. "Schumer will talk to one hundred people, and it's all impersonal, like he's got a list. Eliot talks to ten people, but he makes them all feel like real people."

The reception circuit is only one dimension of the convention-week drama. Equally alluring for an up-and-comer like Spitzer is the possibility of a televised convention speech, which makes a nice splash with the media back home and bolsters a politician's national reputation. Joe Andrew, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) chairman who presided over the 2000 convention, recalls that a bit speaking role helped raise the profile of then–Kansas state Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius, who went on to win her gubernatorial race in 2002. "Even if she was speaking to a half-empty hall," says Andrew, "there were five cameras there from Kansas. It was a big deal." And, though Bill Clinton famously bombed in his 1988 nominating speech for Michael Dukakis, many (including the former president himself) credit his self-effacing discussion of the debacle on "The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson" the Thursday after the convention with boosting his image nationally.

Spitzer won't get the opportunity to test this theory. He has not been allotted a speaking slot at the convention. The attorney general graciously accepts the decision to pass him over, telling me, "This convention has one purpose, to elect John Kerry. Those at the center of it make that decision. It isn't something that means a lot to me." But others are less forgiving—and more conspiratorial. One rumor circulating among the New York delegation is that Schumer intervened to deny Spitzer a speaking role.

CALIFORNIA TREASURER ANGELIDES is luckier. A second-generation Greek American who made a fortune in real estate before taking over the state party in 1991, Angelides is one of two or three prominent Democrats likely to challenge Arnold Schwarzenegger for governor in 2006. At first, it was unclear whether Angelides would, like Spitzer, be left off the speakers' roster in Boston. But, at the last minute, the Kerry campaign appears to have decided they could use a rich white guy from a safely Democratic state after all. An Angelides aide claims not to know what accounted for the last-minute decision. But the fact that Angelides was an early Kerry endorser—back in June 2003—and that he co-chaired Kerry's California campaign, one of the most successful in the country, might have something to do with it.

Angelides is clearly delighted by the three-minute speech he delivered early Monday evening, safely out of prime time. He's the only one of the three possible California gubernatorial candidates who landed that prize. And he misses few opportunities to remind people of it. Addressing the California delegation in a cavernous hotel ballroom Tuesday morning, Angelides enthuses, "The thrill of speaking before the convention last night was overwhelming. I want to thank California for the great support you gave me." Later that day, at a private lunch in honor of Kerry's California fundraisers, Angelides quips, "For those of you who missed my speech last night, the DVD is available."

Angelides is a passionate but not quite gifted public speaker—his voice a little more Ray Romano than Norma Rae. But he knows how to impress potential donors. In this case, Angelides and his co-host for the luncheon, Mark Gorenberg, the Kerry campaign's California finance chair, have scheduled a surprise visit from a secret guest. Just as Gorenberg is introducing Angelides as an "effective public leader and businessman for three decades," a middle-aged woman sitting at the high-roller table starts shrieking, "Hey, there's Cam!" Sure enough, there's John Kerry's brother gliding into the room, having apparently slipped into the restaurant through a back door. Suddenly everyone in the place is tittering and craning their necks. A fund-raiser sitting at the table nearest to me leans over and whispers reverentially to his young son. The woman who first spotted Cam is ready to hyperventilate.

Even if you don't enlist Cam Kerry in your cause, donor outreach is unquestionably one of the convention's most important activities. Joe McLean, a fund-raising consultant who counts Senate candidates Obama and Joe Hoeffel of Pennsylvania among his clients, considers the convention a prime opportunity for challengers to meet out-of-state donors. And the tried and true way to do that is to "cruise the sky suites"—the luxury boxes that house the big Democratic donors high above the convention floor. "You just go knocking on doors," McLean says. "You go see people. It's not hard. The doors stay open most of the time."

Still, if the idea at the convention is to distinguish yourself from your colleagues and potential rivals, it's possible

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to do so too well. In less than four years as mayor of Baltimore, Tom O'Malley has developed a reputation as an urban reformer and a homeland security guru, two traits that, along with his boyish good looks and natural charisma, have marked him as a good bet to win statewide office, maybe as early as 2006. The only blemish on his record is his extended flirtation with a gubernatorial run two years ago, which some Maryland pols blame for helping undermine the campaign of then–Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend. "A lot of people like him because he projects a can-do spirit," says one former fund-raiser for the Maryland Democratic Party. "But there's the question of whether he's maybe a little arrogant, too big for his britches. ... Some people thought O'Malley should have stepped up more to back [Kennedy Townsend]. That he subtly pulled the rug out from under her."

O'Malley's speech Wednesday night, while unquestionably a boon to his political fortunes, risks heightening this feeling. So, unlike Spitzer and Angelides, who must promote themselves whenever possible, O'Malley's chief aim is to demonstrate his humility. This is no small matter. As THE NEW REPUBLIC reported two years ago, keynote convention speaker Harold Ford Jr. proved so resistant to input from Gore-Lieberman officials in 2000 that the campaign ultimately bumped him out of prime time (see Ryan Lizza, "Hurry Up," November 25, 2002). According to Andrews, there's always a risk in these situations that you acquire a rap for being a prima donna, one that's hard to shed down the road. "People who are perceived to be good soldiers—people want to work with them [in the future]," Andrews says.

If this is O'Malley's goal, he succeeds marvelously. As we pull into the entrance of the John F. Kennedy Library in his entourage's blue SUV, O'Malley's driver tells a cop manning the security checkpoint that he wants to drop off the mayor of Baltimore. Before the cop can respond, O'Malley interjects, "I don't care. I can park. I'm not proud." (The cop lets us pass.) O'Malley has come to the library to attend a Maryland delegation luncheon, and, from the outset, it has the look of an event that could drag on for hours. That's apparently what big-name Maryland politicians like House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer have concluded. Hoyer delivers his remarks early in the program, then leaves immediately. But, while O'Malley's aides are furiously Blackberrying back and forth to devise their own graceful exit, O'Malley himself just sits in his seat, listening attentively to speaker after speaker. He sticks around for the duration.

Even on the subject of his much-anticipated speech, O'Malley is pure humility. When a Maryland state senator tells him she's heard from people in the know that the speech is a real winner, he mocks its mediocrity in a joking attempt to "lower expectations." O'Malley also praises the team of DNC and Kerry aides keeping tabs on the convention speeches, saying he's grateful they've left his thoughts intact. One Democratic official confirms that O'Malley and his aides have behaved like "real pros."

Ultimately, though, maybe the sweetest convention accomplishments are the kind you don't have to work for. Late Monday afternoon, I'm sitting alongside Spitzer in his New York delegation seat at the FleetCenter, asking him about the difference between this convention and 2000, when he was just a little-known state regulator who had squeaked into office by the narrowest of margins. Suddenly CNN's Jeff Greenfield spots him and rushes over to introduce himself. "I had to struggle for every little piece [of attention in 2000]," Spitzer confides shortly after Greenfield leaves. "I won't deny that this is enjoyable." Somewhere, Chuck Schumer is getting indigestion. ■

The left's post-Kerry strategy.

Going Long

BY JONATHAN COHN

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

FOR TWO DAYS here at the Democratic National Convention, Howard Dean has shuttled from one delegate meeting to another, acting like the disciplined party surrogate few believed he could ever be. Every time the cameras have turned to him, he's talked up former rival John Kerry, dismissing as irrelevant the very differences that defined their campaign battle. ("I don't see much difference between my position on the war and John Kerry's position.") Even more important, he's toned down the anti-Bush rhetoric that made him such a controversial figure during the primaries, dutifully sticking to the Kerry campaign's script of a positive convention.

But now, for the first time, Dean is publicly addressing an audience made up almost exclusively of liberal voters, the type who flocked to his campaign back when he first took the Democratic primary electorate by storm. They're gathered (where else?) in Cambridge, as part of the Take Back America conference being sponsored by the liberal group Campaign for America's Future. And they have filled the ballroom at the Royal Sonesta Hotel well past its 700-person capacity, prompting the fire marshals to shut down the entrance and forcing several hundred more would-be attendees to wait outside.

Dean does not disappoint. He serves up a few of the old, controversial standbys, like attacking the Republicans for campaigning on "God, gays, and guns"; he also manages to trot out a new one when he urges supporters to run for local office, even if it's just the local library board, to wrest control of politics from those who "like book-burning rather than book-reading." But the real point of his speech is to motivate his supporters to remain engaged even after the November elections so they can continue strengthening the

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"Democratic wing of the Democratic Party." "You all get a month off," Dean tells the crowd. "Then it's back to work."

This isn't just the usual empty appeal to disappointed supporters. All week, the story in Boston has been the unprecedented unity among the party's different ideological and constituent groups. And that unity is real enough when it comes to electing John Kerry in November. But it also masks an important shift in the thinking of liberal Democrats, one that could profoundly change the party in years to come. Just a few months ago, the Democratic establishment feared that many liberals would abandon the party if their standard-bearer, Dean, didn't become the nominee, reprising the disaster of 2000, when left-wing votes for Ralph Nader cost Al Gore the presidency. Now, the very opposite seems to be happening. Instead of trying to sabotage the Democratic Party, liberals want to remake it in their own image.

FOR THE LAST few decades, left-liberals have often thought of the Democratic Party as the lesser of two evils. The antiwar protesters of the 1960s openly disdained not just Democrats but the whole enterprise of electoral politics, which they considered potentially cooptive and corrupting. Constituent groups like labor unions, environmentalists, feminists, and civil rights organizations were less openly hostile to the Democratic Party, but they were also factional, using their leverage within the party to demand concessions that often undermined the party's broader efforts. As recently as the 2000 Democratic convention, that separatist spirit seemed alive and well as anti-globalization protestors—heirs to the '60s activists—staged enormous protests outside the Los Angeles Staples Center. Arianna Huffington presided over an "alternative convention" that even attracted a few elected Democrats in good standing (Representative Jesse Jackson Jr. and Senators Russ Feingold and Paul Wellstone).

But, chastened by the outcome of the 2000 campaign—and the harshly conservative administration it put in the White House—liberals have abandoned that approach entirely, leaving the designated protest areas outside Boston's FleetCenter to supporters of Lyndon LaRouche and others who inhabit the true political fringe. Kerry may not have been the first choice of liberals—or, in many cases, even the second or third—but they don't seem much to care. Although nearly all activists here oppose the war in Iraq, they've embraced in Kerry a candidate who voted for it and has yet to disavow that vote; although nearly all favor not just civil unions but actual marriage rights for gays, they've signed off on a candidate who says he opposes same-sex marriage; and, although nearly all are critical of—if not steadfastly opposed to—free trade, they have endorsed a candidate who voted for NAFTA and said he continues to support free trade. (See Peter Beinart, "United Appeal," page 6.) All this has given Kerry and the Democratic leadership leeway to project a broadly appealing moderate image—by, for example, herding the high-profile liberal convention speakers through early on Tuesday night when the networks weren't broadcasting. "If John Kerry said we had to revise *Brown* v. *Board of Education* because it's outdated law, we'd all say OK," jokes James Carville, the political consultant. "Democrats are unified behind the candidate like I've never seen."

This mentality is evident not only at events like the Take Back America conference, but also in the activities of new voter mobilization groups like Americans Coming Together (ACT), which draws two of its leaders from key liberal interest groups: labor (former AFL-CIO Political Director Steve Rosenthal is ACT's chief executive officer) and women's organizations (Emily's List President Ellen Malcolm has the same position with ACT).

On the surface, this might seem like nothing more than a short-term strategic calculation based on a realization that liberals somehow failed to grasp last time around: Their differences with the Republicans overwhelm their differences with centrist Democrats. But the shift is more fundamental than that: Liberals have put aside their ambivalence toward the party and decided to work for their causes from within. In fact, they're borrowing a strategy from one of their arch-ideological enemies: the Christian Right, which succeeded in changing the direction of the GOP by inserting its members into the party structure. During his speech at Take Back America, Dean explicitly invokes Ralph Reed, the former director of the Christian Coalition, as he talks about the work of Democracy for America, the political action committee he created out of the remnants of Dean for America, and the need to run candidates in elections across the country, no matter how seemingly insignificant the office or how politically hostile the territory. "The way Republicans succeeded is that somebody ran for the school board, somebody ran for the city council, all the way up—and we didn't do that," Dean says. "We cannot be a national party until we take our campaign to Utah, Mississippi, and Texas." Already, Democracy for America has endorsed about 60 candidates for elected office around the country, from Eddgra Fallin, running for a place on the Huntsville, Alabama, school board, to William O'Neill, running for a seat on the Ohio state Supreme Court.

WHAT WOULD IT mean to have liberals stage a takeover of the Democratic Party in this way? To be sure, the party would be forced to rehash familiar ideological battles, as liberals and New Democrats fought, for example, over balancing the budget versus financing new programs. But the consequences of greater liberal influence in the party might not be as dramatic as is commonly assumed. Consider Andy Stern. As president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the largest and most explicitly liberal union in the AFL-CIO, Stern is one of the American left's most influential leaders. Yet, when it comes to welfare reform, the centrist cause that would seem particularly toxic to SEIU's heavily female, heavily minority population, Stern says he's not looking to refight old battles. He wants more money for child care and job training, but he also allows that "it may

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be that people were right, that welfare [dependency] really was a cyclical problem." That's the kind of statement liberals would never have made a few years ago, yet it's also the kind that resonates with many moderate and conservative voters. Nor is Stern's positioning unique. Democracy for America, Dean's organization, dedicates itself to supporting candidates who are "socially progressive" but also "fiscally conservative."

To some extent, Stern, Dean, and other liberal leaders actually seem less concerned with stretching the Democratic Party to the left than they are with simply strengthening its resolve. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the liberal movement itself follows these cues—whether, in the absence of a figure like George W. Bush to unite them, they lose patience with the Democrats and revert to their prior ambivalence. But one can hope. Liberals will always be pulling the Democratic Party to the left, but, as we saw in the 2000 election, both the liberals and the party itself are better off when those fights stay within the family. ■

The GOP tries to enter the story.

Mirror Image

BY MICHAEL CROWLEY

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

"SOME OF THOSE people were literally spitting on soldiers. People were screaming, 'Baby killer!' " It was about five o'clock on Tuesday afternoon along talk-radio row at the FleetCenter, where everyone from Sean Hannity to Air America had set up tables to broadcast live from the belly of the Democratic convention. Sitting at a small metal table, Rich Galen was finishing what was, by his count, his fifteenth media interview that day. "I started this morning at six-fifteen," boasted Galen, a slightly manic Republican operative who has worked for the likes of Newt Gingrich and Dan Quayle and whose tan suits, thin-rimmed glasses, and worn New Balance sneakers give the 57-year-old the look of a youthful high school teacher. Galen logged long days this week on behalf of the Republican Party, one of numerous surrogates the GOP summoned to Boston to inject its spin into media coverage of the Democratic convention and—in a clever bit of meta-publicity that could only be achieved in this week's anything-counts-as-news media environment—to attract coverage of its efforts to attract coverage.

Galen wasn't saying Democrats in Boston this week had spit on any soldiers. But, in his chat with Greg Knapp, a conservative host with the Dallas radio station KLIF, he contended that today's Democrats are spiritual descendants of those raging 1960s radicals. Knapp was quick to pick up this thesis and run with it. "Bill Clinton said last night that everyone supports our troops. Unfortunately, that's not true."

It was a point Republicans were vigorously disseminating here: that the Democrats are vicious haters. On Monday, for instance, I heard GOP Chairman Ed Gillespie make no fewer than four different references to the Kerry fund-raiser in New York earlier this month at which, as Gillespie likes to put it, celebrities like Whoopi Goldberg and Jon Bon Jovi called the president "a cheap thug and a killer and a liar." On Wednesday, Gillespie pounced on reports that Howard Dean had joked about George W. Bush being a "fascist" and a book burner. "I think this political hate speech we're hearing from the other side is alienating voters in the middle," Gillespie explained at one of the daily media briefings he held here.

Ironically, Gillespie's "hate speech" charge somewhat contradicts the GOP's other chief criticism of the Democratic convention: that it is a "makeover," a manufactured display of centrism that conceals the true, Michael Moore–ish radicalism of the Democratic Party. But that charge rang a little hollow anyway. As it turned out, the GOP's response was nearly as stage-managed and manufactured as the convention itself.

EXAMPLE A WAS the headquarters Republicans installed a few blocks from the FleetCenter to coordinate their response to the Democrats. At center was a so-called war room—a dozen or so computer terminals arranged around a pair of TV sets, at which a team of young GOP staffers pulled up research on Democrats and skimmed the *Drudge Report* as they watched the convention. For maximum partisan effect, the office's walls had been festooned with blown-up quotes of Kerry saying various foolish or purportedly revealing things ("I'm a liberal and proud of it"), images of a recent *Boston Herald* front-page headline declaring John Kerry and John Edwards "LEFT OF TED," and, by Tuesday morning, multiple images of Kerry in that absurd blue NASA space suit. (Republicans seemed to consider this a defining moment in the campaign. Several staffers promptly made this photo their computer desktop image, and the office distributed a flyer juxtaposing the Kerry photo with the infamously goofy image of a tank-riding Michael Dukakis.)

The decor made the office feel more like a movie set than a place where actual politics was practiced. Indeed, the war room's main function seemed to be to attract reporters. During my two visits there, at least a half-dozen news organizations passed through, including a CNN team and a *New York Times* photographer. "Campbell Brown was over to shoot a package," bragged Galen, who takes credit for setting up the first opposition party office at a convention, back in 1984. "Foreign press, too. Yesterday we had some Japanese, Indians." When I asked Christine Iverson, the Republican National Committee's press secretary, how many outlets had visited in total, she replied, "Oh, God," and ventured nearly 100. This caused some tension. ("They're crawling all over the place," I heard one operative grumble into the telephone.) Boom mikes hovered in the air as young Republicans edited

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press releases and banged out e-mails to headquarters in Washington. (One message I saw announced that an oppo research official "wants footage of Kerry in space suit from TV." As it turned out, there was none.) At one point, a TV cameraman filming an operative at work even reached over and adjusted the brightness of his computer screen.

Despite the staged quality of the operation, there were some authentic signs of the Republican attack machine in action. During Democratic speeches throughout the week, the Bush-Cheney campaign's intense, twentysomething rapid response director, Matt McDonald, oversaw a team of operatives crafting searing speech responses destined for reporters' inboxes. McDonald's team was on particular alert for the sort of "hate" rhetoric Gillespie had been highlighting. Their first test was Al Gore's speech on Monday night. "Kerry's speechwriters didn't edit Gore's speech, so we should keep an eye on it," McDonald explained hopefully. As Gore spoke, McDonald issued orders into a speakerphone, linking in operatives from the Bush campaign's Washington headquarters. When Gore condemned Bush's management of the Iraq war, McDonald issued an order: "We should get out that report that says ninety-five percent of Democratic delegates voted against the war, while Kerry was for the war." As Gore praised Kerry's Senate environmental record, a speakerphone voice from Washington reported that the files showed Kerry hadn't accomplished much. "OK, so more thin-record stuff," McDonald said. When the speech ended, Steve Schmidt, a burly Bush campaign spokesman from South Jersey with a shaved head, picked up a phone and began to instruct someone to send out "the most hateful lines" from Gore's speech juxtaposed with an at-the-ready quote from Bill Clinton about positive politics. Suddenly Schmidt stopped and barked at me—"Hey, buddy, this is off the record! I'm off the record!"—before hunching over his phone and whispering through the rest of his conversation.

In the end, though, it's not clear just how much damage these GOP commandos managed to inflict. Yes, the GOP's surrogates blanketed television and radio nationwide—Iverson bragged to me that they intended to reach every "targeted" swing-state media market in the country by the end of the convention—but Republicans can always get themselves on television and radio to provide a GOP response to the speeches. Few mainstream journalists, however, bought the premise that Democrats were conducting an "extreme makeover" in the FleetCenter or that John Kerry is a hateful divider in league with Michael Moore. Ultimately, the GOP "war room" amounted to a cheap gimmick. But, for some, that seemed like enough. After a standing-room-only press briefing at GOP headquarters Wednesday morning, I ran into an excited Galen, still wearing his old gray sneakers. "Downstairs, we've got a guy with a sign that says, KERRY RESPONSE THIS WAY," he said gleefully. "So we've got them responding to our response!" He dashed back to his office to grab a camera. "I've got to get a picture of it," he said. I suggested that this back-and-forth was starting to feel like a game. He smiled and said, "It is!" ■

Hadera Dispatch

Tough Love

BY YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

IT'S A HUMID July evening and about 100 people are crowded into a second-floor loft without air conditioning that serves as local Likud headquarters in this northern town. Likud banners expropriate the blue and white of the Israeli flags hanging beside them. There are young Sephardi men, Russian and Ethiopian immigrants, and even an elderly *kes*, or Ethiopian religious leader, in a white robe and turban—the kind of crowd that only the Likud can transform from periphery into governing mainstream.

They have all come to hear Immigrant Absorption Minister Tzipi Livni, one of the Likud's rising stars, defend Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan. It's not an easy crowd to convince. A majority of Likud members in Hadera, one of the Israeli towns hardest hit by terrorism, voted against Sharon in the recent party referendum on withdrawal. Livni is here to tell them why Sharon is proceeding with his plan even though he lost the vote and why they, as loyal Likudniks, should support him. But, if anyone can convince Likudniks that uprooting settlements and withdrawing under terrorist fire isn't a self-betrayal, it's Livni. In a party increasingly dominated by opportunists rather than ideologues, Livni is one of the few Likud leaders who can still recite from memory passages from the writings of Revisionist Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the Likud's ideological mentor. Her family credentials define Likud aristocracy: Her father, Eitan, was operations chief for the underground Irgun; in the right-wing Betar youth movement, they still sing a hymn about an Irgun heroine named Little Sarah—Livni's mother. In fact, Livni possesses the Revisionist bona fides that Sharon, who grew up in the Labor movement, lacks.

Livni has provided Sharon with not only ideological legitimacy but also crucial practical support. She saved Sharon's government after the referendum debacle by suggesting a compromise Cabinet resolution that supported withdrawal without mentioning uprooting settlements, preventing a likely defeat for Sharon and new elections. Livni also averted a schism in the Likud by convincing Sharon not to fire the Cabinet minister who heads the Likud's anti-withdrawal camp. Sharon recently rewarded her with an additional Cabinet portfolio, the housing ministry, a key post with responsibilities that include the projected relocation of Gaza's 7,500 settlers.

"Withdrawal is very painful," Livni tells the crowd, competing with a large fan that generates more noise than relief. "And so, we avoided doing it all these years. But there is no vacuum. The international community is constantly

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proposing plans and so are political forces in Israel. When we said no at Madrid [the 1991 peace conference], we got Oslo. And, when we hesitated again, we got [Ehud] Barak, who put Jerusalem on the table. Either the Likud will initiate its own process and make sure that Israel's basic interests are protected, or others will do it their way, and we'll keep running after them to control the damage."

"What about our values?" someone calls out.

"I have to consider the whole range of our values, not just one aspect," she says. "Our values are a Jewish state and a democratic state. That means we will have to compromise on what is precious for all of us—sovereignty over parts of the land of Israel. Some among us say that they're ready to withdraw only as part of a comprehensive agreement. Others warn against withdrawing under fire. I understand them; there is a legitimate argument among us. But the Likud is our home." She reflexively places her hand on her heart. "You don't burn a home just because of a disagreement. We have to stay together."

ARGUABLY NOT SINCE 1983, when Prime Minister Menachem Begin abruptly resigned from government and became a recluse, has the Likud been in such emotional disarray. There is fury at Sharon's dismissal of the results of the party referendum he initiated himself: At one recent meeting of disgruntled Likud activists, Sharon was compared to the dictatorial Juan Peron. There's a growing party revolt over a proposed unity government—with the Labor Party and the anti-religious Shinui—that would leave the Likud in a coalition without any of its traditional right-wing allies. And there is confusion about the Likud's red lines. Recently, Sharon confidant and former Likud Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert declared that some Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem should be transferred to Palestinian rule, raising the possibility of a Likud-sponsored redivision of the city. Demoralized Likudniks are wondering whether their party still differs from Labor, which, in the last elections, urged unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and construction of a West Bank security fence—precisely the policies now advocated by Sharon. It's an ironic spin on the old election slogan, "Only the Likud Can." Only the Likud, it seems, can implement Labor's policies.

That's why Livni is so crucial in the Likud's struggle to redefine itself. She has become, in effect, the party's psychologist, reassuring the faithful that the Likud remains true to itself even as it withdraws from its core ideological commitment to preserve Israel's post-1967 borders. As she stumps before Likud branches to promote Sharon's plan, Livni resorts to a combination of ideological fervor, empathy, and straight talk. Revisionist Zionism, she notes, is a much broader ideology than loyalty to greater Israel, and it includes a complex mix of nationalist and liberal values; even the old Revisionist song advocating a maximalist Jewish state on both banks of the Jordan River included a verse promising equality "for the son of Nazareth, the son of Arabia, and my son." During a recent interview, Livni read me a passage from her father's autobiography, in which he recalls telling a Labor Zionist in the 1940s that there was no real difference between them because both were committed to creating a Jewish state. "You see?" she asked, perhaps trying to convince herself as much as me. "He didn't mention both banks of the Jordan."

Yet withdrawal is no less difficult for her personally than it is for Sharon's opponents within the Likud. At a recent meeting with American national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, Livni said that her father's tombstone is engraved with the old Revisionist map of an imagined Israel, including both banks of the Jordan. Livni mentioned that detail, she says, because she wanted Rice to understand how hard withdrawal is for a Likudnik.

But, even as Livni empathizes with their trauma, she reminds Likudniks of the party's mistakes, such as Begin's failure to transfer Gaza to Egypt during Israel's withdrawal from Sinai in 1982, which led, eventually, to the current Gaza stalemate. "No Likudnik has ever denied to me that he wished Begin had made that deal," she says. Meeting recently with Irgun veterans, whom she had known as a child by their underground nicknames, she recalled that Begin wanted to annex the West Bank in 1967 and grant Palestinians Israeli citizenship. "Where would we be today if he had succeeded?" she asked. One old-timer, outraged at her refusal to rule out a Palestinian state, replied that her father was turning in his grave.

LIVNI, 46, SPENT most of her career as a lawyer, entering the Knesset only in 1999. Her biography includes one detail she won't discuss: a stint with the Mossad. That discretion extends to her political discourse; Livni's mouth tightens as she speaks, as if to control the flow of words. And, in an increasingly corrupt political culture that includes reported mob penetration of the Likud central committee, Livni is widely respected for her integrity. "We're on opposite sides," says Natan Sharansky, one of the Likud's leading opponents of Gaza withdrawal, "but, with Tzipi, you always know where she stands, not like some other politicians"—a pointed reference to Likud leaders, such as Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who have opportunistically wavered between opposing and endorsing withdrawal.

In fact, Livni did oppose Sharon's plan initially, sharing skeptics' concern that withdrawal under fire would encourage the perception that Israel was on the run. Her turning point came when President Bush endorsed Sharon's opposition to a return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, insisting that refugees return only to a Palestinian state. Livni sees Bush's position as precisely the kind of political victory Sharon needs to convince the Palestinians that their terrorist strategy has backfired. And it's the Likud's ability to draw red lines that still distinguishes the party from Labor, which, she notes, accepted the principle of right-of-return during the Taba talks in January 2001

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and even began negotiating over the number of refugees Israel would absorb.

Still, the Likud of Sharon and Livni has come to resemble the Labor Party—the old Labor of pragmatic hawks like Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan. Though Livni insists she remains true to her ideological roots, her transformation into a pragmatist represents the end of Israel's romantic politics and the marginalization of supporters of greater Israel. And, for all its ambivalence about withdrawal, says Livni, the Likud will remain the party of that new Israeli center.

After her talk in Hadera, Likudniks gathered in small groups to argue over the Gaza plan. "The day we pull out, missiles will fall on Ashkelon [an Israeli town near Gaza]," said one young man. His friend responded, "I say get out of there, and, when the first bullet comes over the fence, we smash them." "Maybe once they're a state," conceded the first speaker, "we'll be able to hit them with everything we have." Livni listened without intervening. Afterward, like a therapist explaining the stages of grief, she said to me, "We need to go through this process. In the end, people will accept the withdrawal, however unhappily. It's because concessions are so hard for us that we can be trusted to make them." ■

Evangelicals v. Muslims in Africa.

Enemy's Enemy

BY ANDREW RICE

KAMPALA, UGANDA

ON A STEAMY Sunday morning, several hundred students are dancing in the aisles of a dilapidated college lecture hall. Dressed in shabby, secondhand sport coats, the men pivot their hips, flinging their elbows back and forth to a lively gospel tune. The women's cornrows bounce up and down. With a showman's sense of timing, Pastor Martin Ssempa sidles slowly onto the stage, grooving to the beat. "Thank you, God!" shouts the bespectacled, 36-year-old evangelist. He has unbuttoned the top button of his natty, cream-colored shirt, and his blue tie hangs loose. "Can you feel it? Oh yeah! Oh yeah!" "Oh my God—it's *working*!" screams a young woman up front. A row ahead of me, another student, a man, raises his arms heavenward and moves his lips in ecstatic prayer. The pastor sinks to his knees, his eyes closed. A beatific grin spreads across his face.

Ssempa's performance, with its Jimmy Swaggart rhetoric and its Mick Jagger swagger, could easily be unfolding inside a clapboard church in Virginia or under a Baptist revival tent in Mississippi. But then the pastor opens his mouth and begins delivering his sermon in a honey-smooth African accent, and it immediately becomes apparent where we are: thousands of miles from American evangelicals, in Kampala, the capital of Uganda.

"Sitting in this church today is the potential to transform not only Uganda but the world," Ssempa tells his congregation, mostly students from Kampala's elite Makerere University. "I am telling you now that God is on the move. God has raised us up. Now God has a job for us." The audience erupts, and Ssempa is forced to shout over the trilling sound of ululating women as he announces that evangelism is on the move. "It's gonna go national! It's gonna go global! America, here we come! Asia, here we come! Australia, sons of sailors and prisoners, here we come! Africa, here we come!"

Actually, in Uganda, a fertile country the size of Oregon, the evangelical movement has already arrived. By most measures, Uganda is now one of the most devout nations on earth. Local church leaders claim that anywhere from five to ten million Ugandans have been "saved" in recent years. (Even the lower estimate would represent one-fifth of the country's 26 million people.) And signs of evangelical influence are everywhere. Uganda's countryside is dotted with hand-painted signs for churches with names like True Life Holy Ghost Fire Church. In bustling Kampala, the backs of many cars are adorned with JESUS SAVES bumper stickers. Born-again First Lady Janet Museveni regularly welcomes American evangelists into the presidential palace.

It's the same story all over Africa: The continent today is in the throes of its own Great Awakening. From the thatch-roofed churches of desolate central Mozambique to densely urban Nigeria (another country with evangelical leaders), where hundreds of thousands flee Lagos every weekend to attend outdoor church revivals, to the war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo, where Congolese crowd storefront congregations, Africans who used to attend mainline Protestant and Catholic churches—and even mosques—are flocking to hear evangelical preachers like Ssempa. Back in 1970,

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17 million Africans attended Pentecostal churches, according to the World Christian Encyclopedia. Today, more than 125 million do—roughly 19 percent of the continent's population. Add the many millions more who profess other varieties of evangelical Christianity, or who still attend mainline churches but nonetheless call themselves "born again," and you have perhaps the most important social movement to hit Africa since postcolonial independence. "[T]he center of gravity of the Christian world," Philip Jenkins writes in *The Next Christendom*, "has shifted inexorably southward." There are 360 million Christians in Africa today, and demographers predict that the continent's Christian population will nearly double by 2025 to 633 million. By then, African Christians will far outnumber those in Europe and North America. So, as the born-again movement gathers momentum across the continent, it may not simply represent the future of Christianity in Africa. It may represent the future of Christianity itself.

This could be good news for the United States. For years, American evangelical missionaries have been coming to Africa, making connections with local populations and doing charitable works in places where few other aid groups dare go. Now, at a time when the United States finds itself losing friends in the developing world, Africa's evangelicals may be one of the strongest pro-American blocs in the world. Grateful for years of patronage by their American brethren, bound by a sense of fellowship to the nation where the contemporary evangelical movement was formed, and respectful of born-again President Bush, these Africans represent a growing constituency of friends. In 2002, the Pew Global Attitudes Project conducted a public opinion poll of 38,000 people in 44 countries including Uganda. It found that nearly three in four Ugandans had favorable opinions of the United States and that 67 percent supported the war on terrorism. The numbers were even higher in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria—all countries that have experienced religious revivals similar to Uganda's—and they were, collectively, far higher than those in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. And, despite the divisive Iraq war, anecdotal evidence suggests that born-again African Christians still embrace the United States. In fact, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has proudly made Uganda a member of America's "coalition of the willing" in Iraq, knowing he can count on Ugandan evangelicals' powerful support for his decision.

But the born-again movement may cause serious problems as well. Libya, Saudi Arabia, and several Persian Gulf monarchies are pouring money into Africa to promote Islam. "Nobody really knows anything exact" about the amount of funding coming in, says Paul Marshall, an expert on Islam in Africa at Freedom House, but the investment is huge. Its tangible impact includes an upsurge in fundamentalist mosques and religious schools across the continent. Combined with the skyrocketing growth of evangelical Christianity—like Islam, a proselytizing faith—this has created a dangerous cocktail. Countries like Nigeria and Tanzania, with populations evenly split between evangelical Christianity and Islam, have witnessed an increase in tension and, in Nigeria's case, horrific religious violence. Indeed, across the continent, religious fervor is reviving old rivalries and creating new ones. And, as religious tension grows, many born-again Africans have begun to see America's wars as extensions of their own struggles at home. Increasingly, Africans like Ssempa support the United States not only because of their ties to American evangelicals or because they believe Washington is fighting terrorism and promoting democracy, but for a baser reason: the United States is killing Muslims. "Guess who supports America, the coalition forces? It's those people who are saved," Brian Ourien, a 25-year-old member of Ssempa's congregation, told me. "And those who are against America are undoubtedly Muslims."

A FEW DAYS after I saw Ssempa preach, I visited him at the headquarters of his Makerere Community Church, located in a building just off campus that Ssempa has dubbed, with characteristic immodesty, the White House. The White House looks out onto a stately old mango tree and contains shelves lined with books on sociology and counseling, as well as one well-thumbed volume titled *Exorcism*. On one door, the pastor had hung a large watercolor portrait of himself. When I arrived, Ssempa was in a meeting, so I waited outside on the porch, where Ourien and other students were hanging out on a long wicker couch. Frank Kabya, a large man in sandals and a colorful shirt, came by. "Have you ever hugged an African?" he asked, before embracing me.

There are many reasons evangelical Christianity has made inroads in Africa. For one, Africans have always been zealous converts. Though missionaries got the job started a century ago, it was largely black converts—not white visitors—who did the arduous work of carrying the gospel to Africa's hinterlands. And the recent eclipse of established churches in Africa mirrors a global trend also seen in Latin America and Asia, where older churches have become less innovative than younger competitors. But, clearly, the greatest attraction of evangelical churches is the sense of community fostered within congregations. When you're born again, you're no longer a member of a tribe or a social class, traditional African hierarchies that can divide and limit people. You're part of a fellowship of believers and of an institution that caters to material needs, such as medical care, that African governments cannot adequately provide. Ssempa's White House, for instance, also functions as an HIV counseling center, a practice area for choirs and dance groups, and a place for evangelical students to socialize between classes.

Converts also are attracted by the evangelical movement's vision of a personal relationship with a miracle-working God. "It's not hope in the future," says Dr. Joseph Serwadda, a former street preacher who now heads one of Uganda's largest evangelical congregations. "It's faith

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now." It's no coincidence that the movement first caught on in Uganda in the 1980s, as the country sank into civil war and the first throes of the AIDS crisis. In desperation, people gravitated to makeshift churches to speak directly to God in hopes of healing their problems.

The association with the United States helps attract followers, too. Young Ugandans, who have grown up watching sharply dressed American preachers on television—many Ugandans watch a TV network that broadcasts Pat Robertson's "The 700 Club" every night—believe being born again is a route to American-style material wealth or at least into a social network that will give them access to jobs, which have historically been doled out based on family and tribal bonds. In fact, under Museveni, evangelical Christianity and its American preachers have become fashionable in Uganda. When Joyce Meyer, an American televangelist whose show airs in Uganda, recently visited the country, she drew tens of thousands to a Kampala soccer stadium. On Sundays, the parking lot outside the tony Kampala Pentecostal Church swells with the BMWs and Land Rovers of the governing elite. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* recently showed to weeks of packed houses in Kampala, even though the price of a movie ticket, about $5, is beyond the means of most Ugandans.

U.S. churches strongly promote this positive image of the United States. It is impossible to determine how much money American church groups pump into Africa. But, in hardscrabble villages across the continent, missionaries build churches, teach in Christian schools, and run rudimentary health clinics. Christian non-governmental organizations, such as World Vision and Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse, spend millions of dollars every year on projects that range from educating Angolans about the dangers of land mines to helping farmers grow sorghum in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan. "I would say that ninety-nine percent of our support comes from the U.S.," Ssempa told me. When he recently needed $60,000 to buy the White House from his landlord, he got it from a church in Columbia, Maryland, where, he claims, one couple mortgaged their own house to help.

The Sunday I attended Ssempa's church, after he finished his sermon, the pastor told his audience that he had a special guest to introduce, a visitor from the United States. All eyes fixed on a stocky white man with a thick moustache who wore a gray safari suit. He introduced himself as Dr. Peter Waldron of Wyoming. Waldron told the congregation that he had once been a military man and that he used to travel around Africa a lot in the 1960s. He was vague about the nature of his work. ("I'm not at liberty to say," he later told me.) But he claimed that, on one occasion, it resulted in some good people getting executed by a firing squad. After that, he contemplated suicide, he told the audience. Then he found Jesus. "When you were born again, you became a new person. You left your tribe," Waldron said. Now, he said, they were all bound together by their common love of God. The audience reacted enthusiastically, warmly welcoming Waldron's speech. When Waldron launched into a story about how he'd recently been invited to the *real* White House in the company of religious rapper MC Hammer, the audience was wowed.

Several days later, I met Waldron at a Kampala hotel. He told me more of his story. At different times in his career, he said, he'd been a syndicated talk-radio host, a lobbyist, and a Republican political consultant. More recently, he had run sports programs for underprivileged youths in Tampa, Florida. Now, he was in Uganda, trying to sell computer software to government ministries while preaching on the weekends. "They embrace Americans here," he said enthusiastically. Indeed, as we sat together, a steady stream of young admirers who had seen Waldron in church came up to greet him. They made complicated handshakes, the way Ugandans do, and Waldron boasted to me that he had met privately with President Museveni and his born-again wife. It struck me that, for many Americans of faith, Uganda—a country where homosexuality and abortion are outlawed, where politicians freely mix church and state, and where outward displays of religious devotion are the norm—represents a kind of haven. The United States may have a born-again president, but it is far too diverse to ever fully be, as conservatives call it, "a Christian nation." But Uganda is on its way to becoming one.

SSEMPA CLAIMS HIS church, though it is just eight years old, has more than 5,000 members. "These are going to be the future lawyers, these are going to be the future corporate leaders, these are going to be the future writers," he said. And the pastor believes it is his mission to save the souls of this budding elite from godlessness or, just as bad, from Islam: For evangelical preachers like Ssempa, Islam is the enemy. "For the last two hundred years, Uganda has been the decisive battleground. It has been the roadblock against the spread of Islam from Egypt through Sudan," he said. Ssempa sees himself as a leader in that fight, which he says is of a piece with America's invasion of Iraq. "By and large, the Muslim tendency is to go by what their leader says to them, and their leaders are radical," Ssempa said. "When their leader gives the order, they will go march in the streets chanting, '*Allahu akbar*!' [Muslims] will kill, they will stone, they will do whatever is necessary to finish the job. They will kill police. They are known as zealots."

Many African Christians share Ssempa's views. And some evangelicals link the U.S. fight against Islamic radicalism with their own past experiences with repression. When Bush spoke about liberating Iraqis from the oppression of Saddam Hussein, evangelical Ugandans here told me they thought back to the reign of their own brutal dictator, Idi Amin. Amin, a member of the country's Muslim minority, ruled for eight bloody years in the 1970s and became known for killing and even eating opponents. He declared Uganda an "Islamic nation," outlawed evangelical churches, and had born-again Christians imprisoned or

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worse. Many Ugandans still cite the example of their only Muslim president as evidence of "the violent nature of Islam," as Ssempa put it. In fact, few cared whether Saddam really possessed weapons of mass destruction or whether the United States genuinely wanted to promote democracy in the Middle East. "In the case of Iraq," Jenkins says, support among African evangelicals stems from "the feeling of 'my enemy's enemy.' "

Evangelicals are hardly persecuted in Uganda today—if anything, under Museveni, evangelical Christianity has a governmental imprimatur. But resentments dating back to the Amin era still fester, and they are exacerbated by the growth of Islam in Africa. Ssempa and other evangelicals frequently complained to me about how Middle Eastern Muslim states are pumping money into African proselytizing. Though Muslims comprise only 16 percent of the Ugandan population, foreign largesse gives Muslim students an edge when it comes to education, Ssempa claimed. What he's doing, he said, is trying to right the balance. "There is a race," he said angrily. "Islam is also racing for the soul and mind of the Africans."

Just across campus, Sam Ahmad Ssentongo was also fuming. The imam of the Makerere University Mosque, a slight, soft-spoken man with a scraggly beard, told me he was fed up with preachers like Ssempa. "It is one thing to have a discussion relating to our feelings regarding the Koran and the Bible, to search for the truth," the imam said. "It is another thing to take the Koran and tread on it with his shoes and [for evangelical preachers to] make all these [defamatory] allegations about the Prophet Mohammed. That is the thing that is breeding the friction." What's more, he is infuriated by the proselytizing of evangelicals, who are much more committed to spreading their faith than older churches in Africa were.

In Uganda and elsewhere in Africa, this anger has spawned sectarian violence. Nigeria has seen intermittent rioting since twelve state governments in its largely Muslim north declared that they would enforce *sharia*, or Islamic law. Fighting between Christians and Muslims in the Nigerian city of Kaduna alone claimed more than 1,000 lives in 2000. More recently, over 200 Nigerians died in riots sparked when a newspaper columnist wrote that Mohammed might have approved of scantily clad ladies at the Miss World competition, which was to be hosted by Nigeria. Meanwhile, during a recent soccer match between Muslim Sudan and heavily evangelical Zambia, whose born-again president declared it a "Christian nation" in 1991, officials from the visiting Sudanese side took to the field at halftime to kneel and pray toward Mecca. Zambian fans took that as a provocation and rioted. In Kenya, church leaders are suing to outlaw special Islamic courts set up decades ago to arbitrate marriage and inheritance disputes among Muslims. Kenyan Muslim leaders have accused the U.S. Embassy of organizing Christians to march against the courts, and they have threatened that Muslim areas may try to secede from the country if they are not allowed to introduce *sharia*. Similar calls for *sharia* have arisen in Tanzania, where the Muslim-dominated island of Zanzibar is perennially threatening to secede from the country and where a recent spate of bombings has hurt tourism on Zanzibar's stunning beaches. Even sleepy Malawi is not immune. When police arrested five suspected terrorists last summer, apparently at America's request, Muslims rioted, burning down churches and attacking clergymen in the town of Mangoci.

And, in Africa, where there is too much poverty and too many guns, these disputes can quickly turn big. In Côte d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, a Christian politician from the country's south, won election to the presidency in 2000. Rebel movements popped up in the Muslim north of the country, led by men who disdained Gbagbo's open faith—Gbagbo surrounded himself with evangelical preachers—and his thuggishness, and a bloody civil war broke out. In Uganda, in the late '90s, a fundamentalist Muslim group called the *tabliqs* rioted in Kampala, and a Muslim-led rebel army launched a war against the government.

Though the rebels have been crushed, across Uganda Muslims and evangelical Christians still skirmish, portending potentially worse violence. Muslims constantly complain that Christian radio stations spread lies about Islam and say Arabic-speaking evangelists are stirring up trouble in Muslim neighborhoods. In the countryside, evangelical revivals sometimes lead to brawls between born-again Christians and their Muslim neighbors. When one evangelist recently exhorted his followers to challenge Muslims' informal monopoly over the butcher trade in Uganda, a prominent imam called for jihad against the Christian population.

Since September 11, rhetoric has become harsher, nerves rawer, and tempers shorter in Uganda. "There has [already] been this radicalization on both sides, and the flashpoint has lowered dramatically," says Jenkins. Indeed, after the attacks on New York and Washington, Kampala street vendors did a brisk business in Osama bin Laden posters, and Muslim callers jammed the lines of local radio stations to lambaste the United States. "We are heading—you can see it—toward a clash," said Immam Kasozi, another local Muslim leader. As we sat in his cramped printing shop in downtown Kampala, he jabbed his finger at the cover of a magazine sitting on his desk that bore the infamous image of an Iraqi prisoner, cloaked, hooded, and hooked to electrodes. "If I see this, I will tell my people to prepare for it, because, sooner or later, it will come to you," he said. "[The United States] will never stop fighting you until you turn away from your religion." In fact, to many Muslims, local Christian evangelism is one more piece of a growing conspiracy against Islam. "There is so much money coming from America to support the born-again movement," Ssentongo said. Evangelists like Ssempa, they believe, are using U.S. money to lure Muslim youth away from their faith with promises of academic scholarships and other goodies. "I know they are targeting us," Kasozi said. And by "they," he also means the United States. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Speaking Freely

TO RICHARD LINKLATER attention must be paid. Born in Texas in 1960, he has been making films since 1988 and has established himself as sui generis through viewpoint and style. Some instances. His first feature, *Slacker*, dealt with the drifting of dropout students in his hometown of Austin and was reticently daring: the picture itself had the lackadaisical loneliness of its characters' lives. Others of his films have this mood—young people trying to find purpose without caring strenuously about purpose. On the contrary, *The School of Rock* was a carefully shaped comedy about elementary school kids and their music, and might have succeeded as a rock extravaganza except that it relied heavily on Jack Black, an eccentric comic who can't sustain a whole film. *Tape* did succeed, though it had only three characters in a hotel room, remembering an incident from their college days. Largely through his insistence that that these people mattered to him, Linklater took us along with him.

BEFORE SUNSET
(Warner Independent)

ORWELL ROLLS IN HIS GRAVE
(Sag Harbor-Basement)

Now he has trumped one of his aces. In 1995 Linklater made *Before Sunrise*, about a young American man and a young Parisian woman who meet on a train to Vienna. Again with a dexterity that somehow conveyed affectionate concern for this pair, Linklater explored the romantic possibilities of their encounter. Now he has made **BEFORE SUNSET**, which is about the same pair nine years later, meeting this time in Paris.

They had parted after their Vienna adventure. The young man returned to New York, married, had a child, and wrote a novel—apparently about that Vienna night—which is a best-seller. It has brought him on a European book tour. The young woman has read the book and is at the bookshop, lingering in the background, alerting him shyly to her presence. He responds.

Linklater evidently wanted to find out the long-range effects of the first episode on these two people. It's almost as if he were chastising himself for the romantic shape of the first film and wanted to see what happened to this pair in relatively real life after the neat romance was tied up. This venture called for special daring and skill. Approximately seventy-eight of the picture's eighty minutes consist of talk between these two, as they walk around Paris in the brief time before he is supposed to leave. The screenplay is credited to Linklater and the two actors—once again they are Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy—but the effect is as if Linklater had provided only a thematic road map and had asked his actors to improvise as they went along. The result is a peculiar small gem, a true Linklater gem. The verity of the film, rather than any novelty or twist, keeps us fixed.

That verity is in more than the details. Hawke talks of his marriage, to a woman whom he respects but doesn't love, and of his son, whom he adores. Delpy tells of her various jobs with socially concerned groups and of her various experiences with men. The depth in the film, hardly profound but affecting because we don't expect even this much, comes from the slow realization, by us and by them, that their dissatisfactions with their lives are *part* of their lives. He and she would have had disappointments: if they had remained together, they would not have had perfection. Of course all lives are not equivalent, Linklater seems to say, but don't torment yourself with the thought that you have missed out on flawless paradise. Everyone must choose, usually wants to choose, and choice always means—in proportions that vary—acquisitions and losses.

Visually Linklater made sure that this anti-romance is counterpointed with romantic atmosphere. As Hawke and Delpy talk, they wander through picture-book old Paris. (We never see anything that was built after 1800.) The rich colors in Lee Daniels's camera tease at the factuality of the two lives. The film's running time is almost actual—screen time virtually equals the time these two people spend talking before the ending that we know will come about. The ending is, once again, not firmly fixed. Perhaps nine years from now there will be not a sequel, but another chapter.

Hawke is almost at ease. He has to work hard in order to seem effortless. Occasionally there is a threadbare spot in his performance when we can see the actor acting. Delpy is perfect, completely present and winning from the moment she appears. Linklater has used them both adroitly as instruments of his imagination. Once again he shows in a tacit way that he is an experimental and adventurous director, without advertisement, simply by going on about his highly personal business. One of his small but helpful perceptions: Delpy, European, still smokes; Hawke, American, doesn't (though he takes a cigarette from her).

In his own field, Robert Kane Pappas is also daring. He has made a documentary that is almost entirely what documentaries are supposed to avoid: a series of talking heads. His film has few attempts at cinematic cleverness. He has been more clever than that: his heads talk interestingly and pungently—about a pressing and scary subject.

ORWELL ROLLS IN HIS GRAVE, using quotations from *1984*, attacks the growing power of a few tycoons in the media field. It is based on the hypnotically frightening fact that every means of communication meant to serve us is becoming a means of maneuvering us. Press and radio and, most recently, television have always been principally in the hands of the powerful, but as time goes on, the number of the powerful de-

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creases. William Randolph Hearst, once considered an emperor, was a vassal compared with Rupert Murdoch.

Former newscast producers, media analysts, investigative reporters, professors of media studies at several universities, a congressman, and (naturally) Michael Moore speak forcefully on a situation that is simultaneously dangerous and ludicrous. The more effective the media become, the fewer the people who control them. These facts will not surprise many, but Pappas's film will heighten the viewer's anxiety and frustration. (One has only to switch on the BBC after watching a network newscast to get some inkling of the contrast between spoon-fed news and candor—and few would contend that the BBC does everything that needs to be done.)

The catch-22 in the matter is that unless we have private sources of information, we are forced to depend on the people who are spoon-feeding us for some hints of the news that is being left out. Pappas's talking heads can't exactly solve the problem, but they help to keep us from forgetting it. ■

Ronald Steel

The Bill Clinton Show

My Life
By Bill Clinton
(Alfred A. Knopf, 957 pp., $35)

Bill Clinton used to tell us that he wanted to feel our pain, even though he often gave us one. In this characteristically garrulous volume of almost one thousand pages, he tells us all about his own pain. We learn how his traumatic childhood experiences led him to be a "secret-keeper" whose skill at living "parallel lives" helped him to cope when the "old demons of self-doubt and impending destruction reared their ugly heads again." We are told also that he lived a private life of self-doubt and was harrowed by feelings of inadequacy even while he conveyed an impression of vigorous self-assurance. And we are assured that he, like all deeply sensitive and self-doubting people, wants desperately to be liked.

So Bill Clinton, too, lest we ever questioned it, has known his dark nights of the soul. That, dear reader, is the good news. For the first couple hundred pages in his memoir, Clinton talks with disarming frankness about the father who died before he was born, and the abusive alcoholic his mother later married to help raise her child; about how this plucky and appealing woman nourished his hopes and passed on to him her zest for living; about his drive to succeed and to make everyone like him; about the road that took an ambitious, winning boy nicknamed Elvis from a bend in the road called Hope, Arkansas to Georgetown, Oxford, Yale, and the governor's mansion at Little Rock by the age of thirty-two. He does not tell the story nearly as well as David Maraniss did in *First in His Class*, his engrossing study of Clinton's pre-presidential years. But Clinton writes with grace and fluidity, and knows how to relate the greatest story he ever told.

That, as I say, is the good news. The bad news is that the following seven hundred pages is a largely indigestible mass of appointment-book entries, policy-wonk explanations of the legislative process, and scrapbook notes about encounters with the world's top-notch people. There is public accountability ("Between Thanksgiving and Christmas we hosted a large number of receptions and parties for Congress, the press, the Secret Service, the residence staff, the White House staff and cabinet, other administration officials and supporters from around the country, family, and friends"), respectful hat-tipping ("That night the Jordans hosted a birthday party for me, with old friends and some new ones. Jackie Kennedy Onassis and her companion, Maurice Tempelsman, came, along with Bill and Rose Styron, and Katharine Graham, the publisher of *The Washington Post* and one of the people I most admired in Washington"), and name-dropping ("In early July, Hillary, Chelsea, and I, after a couple of relaxing days with King Juan Carlos and Queen

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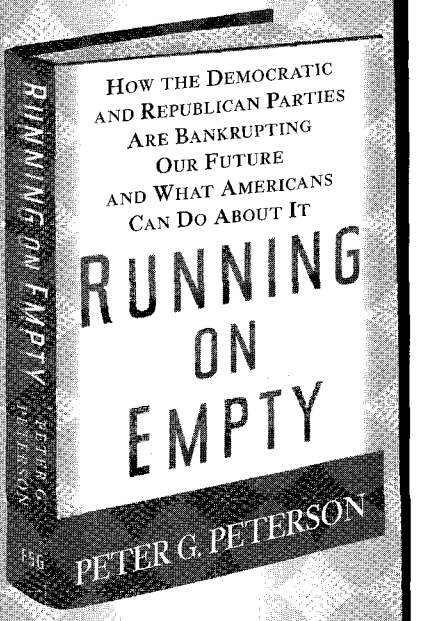
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Sofia on the island of Majorca, were in Madrid for the NATO meeting"). At times the juxtaposition of the banal and the bizarre, the gossip and the self-promotion, leaves one uncertain whether to yawn or to laugh.

Consider this triple-whopper paragraph:

> A week later, after I announced an eighteen-month extension of our mission in Bosnia, Hillary and I were on our way to Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand for a combination of work and a vacation that we needed. We began with three days of pure fun in Hawaii, then flew on to Sydney, Australia. After a meeting with Prime Minister John Howard, a speech to the Australian parliament in Canberra, and a day in Sydney, including an unforgettable game with one of the greatest golfers of our time, Greg Norman, we flew north to Port Douglas, a coastal resort on the Coral Sea near the Great Barrier Reef. While there, we walked through the Daintree Rainforest with an aboriginal guide, toured a wildlife preserve where I cuddled a koala named Chelsea, and snorkeled around the magnificent reef. Like coral reefs the world over, it was threatened by ocean pollution, global warming, and physical abuse. Just before we went out to see it, I announced America's support for the International Coral Reef Initiative, which was designed to prevent further destruction of reefs everywhere.

For much of its leisurely length, this book reads like the longest shaggy dog story ever told. It moves along inexorably, almost majestically, with excruciating slowness, like a glacier loosened by global warming, sweeping up everything in its wake—the good, the bad, the ugly, along with forests (of paper pulp) and rivers (of ink). Still, it must be said that, by current standards, it is not badly written. And it is distinctive among modern presidential memoirs, along with Jimmy Carter's engaging books, in almost certainly having been written by the credited author himself.

Like most celebrity biographies, this volume would be twice as good were it half as long. (Are high-profile books ever read by their editors before they are published?) Of course, one does not approach Bill Clinton expecting a fine economy of phrase, any more than one goes to McDonald's for a mini-burger on a dry bun. The oversized, over-decorated package is a central part of the message. *My Life* is not, to be sure, a literary masterpiece in the same league as, say, the memoirs of Charles de Gaulle. But considering that we are currently graced with a president who has trouble putting together two consecutive unscripted grammatical sentences, Clinton's articulateness must count as an achievement.

A good part of Clinton's appeal is the transparency of his motives. He is such an ebullient character, wanting so eagerly to please, that his political calculations come spilling out even when he is unlikely to intend it. Consider his account of how, when he was governor, the Arkansas legislature passed a popular bill to raise gasoline taxes to pay for new highways. "I liked the program and thought it would be good for the economy," he relates with a straight face, "but in the election I had pledged not to support a major tax increase. So I vetoed the bill and told its sponsors I wouldn't fight their efforts to override it." And thus he had the best of both worlds—a situation that happened more than once in his charmed life. One finds it again, for example, in his tortuous ten-page narration of why he was not drafted to serve in Vietnam: "The deescalation of the war reduced the need for new troops to the point that my number was never called. I always felt bad about escaping the risks that had taken the lives of so many of my generation whose claim to a future was as legitimate as mine." Is this disingenuous? Probably. But, to his credit, he at least recognizes and deals directly with an issue that others of his generation—such as, again, the current incumbent of the White House—have preferred to sweep under the rug.

COURTESY KNOPF

Bill Clinton with Jiang Zemin in the Oval Office, 1997

But Clinton, too, sweeps some things under the rug. He has no space in his tome for the case of Ricky Ray Rector, the mentally defective convicted murderer whose execution he hurried back to Little Rock to approve during the touch-and-go campaign of 1992; but he does devote nearly two pages to recounting why he got a fancy haircut from a Beverly Hills stylist, and how the flare-up over that critical issue distracted the media from reporting an unfairly under-publicized photo-op basketball game he played with poor kids in a Los Angeles ghetto. In the matter of his endorsement of Attorney General Janet Reno's disastrous decision to launch an FBI attack on a fundamentalist sect in Waco, Texas, resulting in the deaths of more than eighty people, Clinton blames bad staff "advice that ran counter to my instincts." And while he acknowledges that "the failure to try to stop Rwanda's tragedies became one of the greatest regrets of my presidency," he devotes little more space to it than he does to his prowess in the Arkansas tomato-eating contest in which he participated during the election for governor in 1978.

Forever in the running for best-liked guy, he seems incapable of making a truly harsh judgment of virtually anyone, except of course his obsessed tormentor Kenneth Starr. And of the tragicomic impeachment episode—part right-wing putsch, part media pornography—one gets an angrier and more detailed account from his former staffer Sidney Blumenthal in *The Clinton Wars*. But otherwise Clinton has a kind word for nearly everyone. Listen to him, a private citizen who has no official position obliging him to be mealy-mouthed today, on the current authoritarian Italian-media-monopolist head of state:

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> Berlusconi was, in some ways, Italy's first television-age politician: charismatic, strong-willed, and determined to bring his own brand of discipline and direction to Italy's notoriously unstable political life. His critics accused him of trying to impose a neo-fascist order on Italy, a charge he strongly denied. I was pleased with Berlusconi's assurances that he was committed to preserving democracy and human rights, maintaining Italy's historic partnership with the United States, and fulfilling Italy's NATO responsibilities in Bosnia.

Neville Chamberlain was no doubt similarly reassured in the 1930s by the explanations of another "charismatic, strong-willed" Italian politician "determined to bring his own brand of discipline and direction to Italy's notoriously unstable political life."

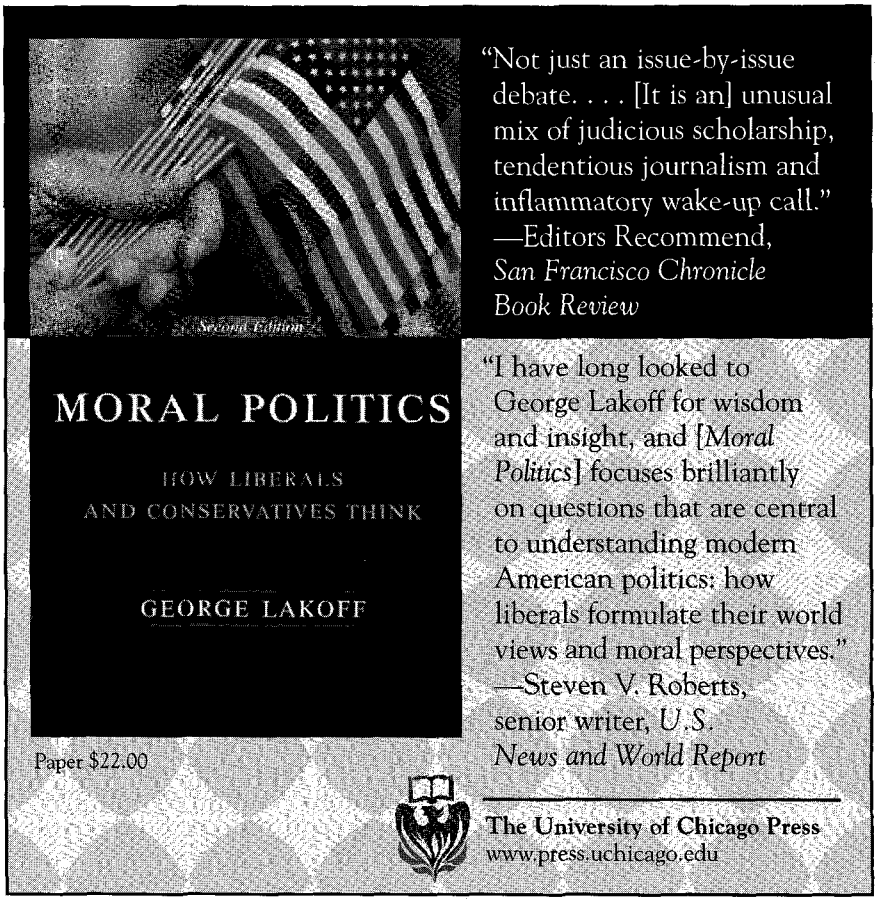
BUT IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO cavil too much over the low crimes and misdemeanors in this book. The reader must regard *My Life* not as a literary work or even as a first cut at history, but as a celebrity tell-all or, more accurately, tell-some. That, certainly, is how the people feel who have been lining up for blocks and waiting for hours to obtain their very own copy of the book with its author's signature and, if they are lucky, a hug from the author himself. Whatever one thinks of Bill Clinton, it is obvious that he transcends the narrow boundaries of the office he held with such high drama and low theater for eight years. He is a national—even an international—celebrity. Were he not blocked by the anti-third-term amendment in the Constitution, he could almost certainly be re-elected today. After all, despite—or because of—his notorious troubles, he left office with a 63 percent approval rating.

And he is not ours alone. If the feuding peoples of the world had to agree on a single figure to bless and coax and entertain them all as the chief executive of a contentious planet, to whom else would they turn? Clinton is our first global celebrity president. Reagan, too, was a celebrity who showed how the presidency could be treated as a role. Certainly it was the best role that Reagan ever landed, and it was a role that he played even more triumphantly and ceremoniously in death. But Reagan was a scripted president whose every word and gesture was carefully calculated, designed to reveal virtually nothing of the man inside. Reagan's appeal, however real it was to millions of Americans, was entirely domestic. He did not sell well beyond the home market.

Clinton, by contrast, seems human—all too human—in his carnal excesses, his emotional sloppiness, his physicality, his spontaneity and impulsiveness, his willingness to test how far he could push his charm and his luck, his sheer joy in being at the center of power and attention. He is a supremely unscripted man. And he is also a born storyteller, whose natural story, greatest story, and perhaps only truly interesting story is himself. Would that in this book there were more of that story.

Clinton's place in our national mythology rests not on his accomplishments or the lack of them, but on his personality. His whole life has been devoted to making people like him. And he has been remarkably successful at it. Thus it is hardly surprising that he is such a consummate and unself-conscious narcissist. Consider the title of his book. Other politicians write memoirs with yawn-inducing titles such as *Power and Purpose* or *A Time of Decision* or *The Price of Responsibility*. Clinton chose a title that reflects his major interest, and for that matter the public's major interest in him. It was inevitable that he would call the book *My Life*. Oprah Winfrey, America's great maestro of the confessional, will probably give her memoirs the same title.

The title is good marketing, of course, and at least it is honest. But it perfectly captures the Clinton problem. The man's overriding passion, greater even than his passion for politics, is himself. He accomplished a good deal during his eight years as president, but not nearly as much as he might have accomplished had he not been so self-indulgent and so self-regarding. Of course he had ferocious enemies, some of whom seemed driven by their own demons at times. They envied him for his effectiveness and his supreme self-assurance as much as for his policies, and their envy intensified their hatred. Some of that hatred will soon seem unbalanced and even demented, just as we now consider the frenzied denunciations of Franklin Roosevelt during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his presidency. But the fact is that Clinton stopped far short of what he could have done and could have been.

He even addresses this issue himself in quoting an editorialist's judgment that he "missed the greatness that once seemed within his grasp." His retort is to list his achievements, which were not inconsiderable, and to note apologetically that history is always revising judgments made about political leaders. There is truth in this: the current veneration of Reagan, which rests entirely on a sentimentalization of his carefully crafted persona, will seem incomprehensible a decade or two from now. To be sure, great leaders are judged not only by what they do, but also by what they might have done with the powers and abilities they had. The fact that Bill Clinton was not a great president—of which there have been few—does not diminish the fact that on balance he was a fairly good president. Yet he could have been more. And that is a pity not only for him, but also for us. ■

James Wood

The Digressionist

OBLIVION: STORIES
By David Foster Wallace
(Little, Brown, 329 pp., $25.95)

I.

THE GIBBOUS MOON, NOT full but fuller than a semicircle, is a part that represents a whole, and there are evenings when we seem to "see" the shadow of this wholeness: we naturally complete the circle. This is not a bad emblem for how fiction—indeed, any mimetic art—represents a world without needing to offer us all of it. Fiction is a picture-making art, and we understand that pictures are only made frames around the potentially limitless canvas of the unmade. Obviously enough, fiction that took place in real time would resemble the conundrum explored by Josiah Royce and Borges, that of the map that is the same size as the landscape it represents.

American fiction has been unusually burdened with the question of form and immersion; one might call the major trend in modern American writing "immersion fiction." The desire to write the Great American Novel is, after all, really just the attempt somehow to cover the nation, to provide a form big enough for American bigness. (Did anyone ever imagine the Great American Novel a mere novella?) American exceptionalism—the idea that American reality is unique in size, quiddity, and strangeness—produces American literary exceptionalism. Philip Roth's statement in 1961, about how reality in America has begun to out-fictionalize fiction, is the most famous example of a writer's frustration, but it might also be seen as a warped declaration of respect, not so very far from Whitman's joyous "the United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem." It is surely not accidental that the dominant mode of recent American fiction has been—despite injections of fantasy—solidly realistic, and often epic in reach: think of Richard Powers, William T. Vollmann, the Updike of the Rabbit novels, Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, the Richard Ford of *Independence Day*, Joyce Carol Oates, Jonathan Franzen, the later Philip Roth, even Tom Wolfe. These writers have been keen to give us an American reality-bath; teapot-sized tempests won't do.

David Foster Wallace is one of the leading American immersion fictionalists. But his method is rather unusual. Rather than fill his fictions with multiple scenes and hundreds of characters, he bloats his sentences with mimesis. He wants his prose to register all the many decompositions that language has already undergone in ordinary American discourse—where "ordinary" means the sloppy illiteracies of e-mail, the facilities of the Net, the neologistic outlandishness of middle-management-speak, the knowing carelessness of journalism. He wants his prose to be manically absorptive, endlessly soaking up the foul linguistic run-off of contemporary fluidity. His sentences—sometimes literally—aspire to be endless. Despite the size of some of his books, he is in fact a micro-realist.

And it should be said that he is very good at this. He has an excellent ear. One knows this just by comparing him to writers whom he has, however lightly, influenced. Jonathan Franzen's showing off about neuroblasters and neural transmitters in *The Corrections* sounded uncomfortably as if he had just Googled the information up. Colson Whitehead's prose frequently seems unaware of its own illiteracy, as when, for instance, he writes in *John Henry Days*: "Lucien and the ice cream melt in the heat at deviant rates," when really he means "divergent." Or this, from the same novel: "Once in a while one of them said I love you, to flat sonant agreement from the other pillow." Whitehead aims to do something Wallace usually achieves with greater suppleness: he wants to borrow the precision that a word like "deviant" or "sonant" possesses in its colder official—that is, scientific or theoretical or statistical—discourse, and then assault that precision within the new, looser, warmer context of literature. This is deconstruction, essentially. (Anyone puzzled about where theory went after it died in the academy—or, more precisely, where the language of theory went—need look no further than contemporary American fiction, whose leading writers represent the first generation to have studied literary theory and cultural studies at college.)

WALLACE, LIKE WHITEHEAD and Franzen, likes the interruption, the shock, that comes about with the jostling of linguistic registers. Here, for instance, he describes a journalist whose low-tech notebook—rather than a tape recorder or laptop—pleases him: "The fliptop stenographer's notebook was partly for effect, but it was also what Skip Atwater had gotten in the habit of using out in the field for background at the start of his career, and its personal semiotics and mojo were profound; he was comfortable with it." In that sentence, "personal semiotics and mojo" is almost, in a strict sense, meaningless; the point is precisely that meaning is being mangled; meaning is being customized by Skip. Wallace is very interested in free indirect style—in which an author's third-person prose is so infected by the language of the character it is inhabiting that it becomes almost indistinguishable from that character's language—

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and certainly in this case Wallace is attempting to inhabit the journalist's own language. This is Skip, in effect, musing to himself. (Whitehead and Franzen, by contrast, rarely seem to pull off their attempts at free indirect style.) The only wobble comes with that sarcastic word "profound," in which Wallace seems to wink at us, to pull away from his character, as if saying to us, "How ridiculous of Skip that he should use the word 'profound' in the same sentence as 'personal semiotics and mojo'—how can his relation to his notebook be in any way profound?" A faint apprehension of satire, of mockery, never leaves Wallace's treatment of his characters.

Still, the relentlessness of his commitment to decomposing his own language can yield an authentic American loneliness, a hollowed space filled only by brand names and the sound of corporate jingling:

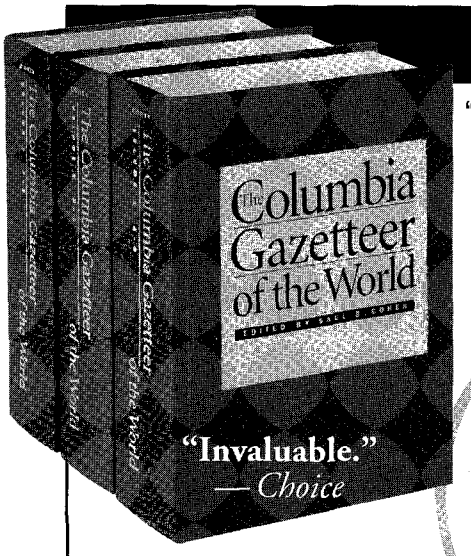
> In his spare time Terry Schmidt read, watched satellite television, collected rare and uncirculated US coins, ran discriminant analyses of TFG statistics on his Apple PowerBook, worked in the small home laboratory he'd established in his condominium's utility room, and power-walked on a treadmill in a line of eighteen identical treadmills on the mezzanine-level CardioDeck of a Bally Total Fitness franchise just east of the Prudential Center on Mies van der Rohe Way, where he sometimes also used the sauna.

In this passage, from "Mister Squishy," the first story in *Oblivion*, Wallace describes an advertising executive at a company called Reesemeyer Shannon Belt. The story takes place on the nineteenth floor of a Chicago skyscraper, as Schmidt and a colleague lead a focus group through a tasting and response session. They are judging a new chocolate cake called *Felony!* Most of the story is written in a hideous pastiche of marketing-speak, hovering somewhere between Schmidt's consciousness and the consciousness of the story's actual narrator. The story is fundamentally unreadable—deliberately, defiantly so. One suspects that Wallace's ideal here is the final collapse of the English sentence into a gibberish of acronyms and data: "A bleach-alternative detergent's agency had once hired Team ΔY to convene primipara mothers aged 29 to 34 whose TATs had indicated insecurities at three key loci and to administer questionnaires whose items were designed to provoke and/or heighten those insecurities."

Wallace renders a world from which the human has been all but evacuated. Once or twice, "Mister Squishy" seems to open out, to let us peer sympathetically into Terry Schmidt's voided contamination. At one moment Schmidt is reassuring himself that despite the awfulness of the job, he does indeed have an inner life separate from the workings of Reesemeyer Shannon Belt: "he had a vivid and complex inner life, and introspected a great deal." Wallace's canny use of the horrid verb "introspected" alerts us to the likelihood that Schmidt is simply deceiving himself, that he is too far gone to be recoverable. Someone who thinks that he introspects a great deal is probably not very introspective.

There are glintings like this throughout this talented, frustrating, and finally intolerable book. Wallace is an avant-gardist, keen to frustrate ordinary, linear comprehensibility. He is also something of a moralist, outraged by the degree to which American consciousness has been colonized by advertising and all kinds of trivial mediation: "The anecdote, which the intern amused everyone by trying at first to phrase very delicately, involved her fiancé, as an undergraduate, performing cunnilingus on what was at that time one of Swarthmore's most beautiful and widely desired girls, with zero percent body fat." The usual charge, that Wallace lacks "heart," seems wrong-headed. In his strange way, he is deeply interested in human beings, if not quite interested in characters as such. Or rather, he is interested in humans at the point at which they cede their humanity to the punitive conformity that surrounds them. He backs into his characters, occupying the wake they leave behind them as they disappear into American reality.

BUT HE NEVER MOVES US. His fictions strangely reproduce the extreme coldness that they abhor. This cannot be overemphasized, since it registers the high cost of the manic obstructions that his sentences aim to be. Wallace has many ardent followers (his name is just "DFW" on some college campuses), but surely no



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one has ever claimed to be moved by him. Amused, impressed, challenged, even finely tormented; but not involved, quickened, raised, imparadised. Wallace may be torn between desiring the ordinary satisfactions of readerly connection and disdaining their very ordinariness. Alas, the latter impulse almost always vanquishes the former.

The main reason for this is that we are too busy drowning in his immersion-lessons to get any air. Almost all the stories in this book are more than forty pages long, and the last one, "The Suffering Channel," runs to more than ninety pages. "Mister Squishy" is sixty-four pages, in which every meandering sentence strives to inhabit the ugliness of corporate language. Wallace is famous for his manic garrulousness, though why, in the area of art, this should be any greater distinction than having an unusually long toe is unclear. Sure enough, when Wallace informs us about the ingredients of a *Felony!*, a mere sentence or two will not suffice. We must be sunk into it, have our faces rubbed in the synthetic horror. Three-quarters of a page is consumed by this kind of thing:

> A domed cylinder of flourless maltitol-flavored sponge cake covered entirely in 2.4mm of a high-lecithin chocolate frosting manufactured with trace amounts of butter, cocoa butter, baker's chocolate, chocolate liquor, vanilla extract, dextrose, and sorbitol . . . which high-end frosting was then also injected by high-pressure confectionery needle into the 26 x 13mm hollow ellipse in each *Felony!*'s center (a center which in for example Hostess Inc.'s products was packed with what amounted to a sucrotic whipped lard). . . .

Again and again, Wallace shadows his subjects so closely that his prose begs to take on their properties, to embody their deformities. Mimesis—lots of mimesis—is all well and good, but fiction needs internal and external borders. As Henry James rightly notes in one of his prefaces, "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so." And Wallace's subjects are more often cultural subjects than human subjects. Thus, while one proper ideal of novelistic art is the author's self-sacrificial stylistic collapse into the individual idiolects of his characters, Wallace too often ends up only collapsing into the collective idiolect of the culture that he is documenting. This is not without interest, because Wallace is very often lively, but it is also supremely ugly, and finally it feels drastically limited. Wallace's happiest readers like to argue for the brilliance with which he can "do" anything: he can "do" the language of a focus group, of a blank teenager, of an insurance salesman, of celebrity journalism. But if what you are super-mimetically "doing" is ugly, you will produce super-mimetically ugly prose. Here, for instance, is Wallace "doing" New York glossy magazine journalism:

> The other *Style* piece the associate editor had referred to concerned The Suffering Channel, a wide grid cable venture that Atwater had gotten Laurel Manderley to do an end run and pitch directly to the editor's head intern for WHAT IN THE WORLD. Atwater was one of three full time salarymen tasked to the WITW feature, which received .75 editorial pages per week, and was the closest any of the BSG weeklies got to freakshow or tabloid, and was a bone of contention at the very highest levels of *Style*. The staff size and large font specs meant that Skip Atwater was officially contracted for one 400 word piece every three weeks, except the juniormost of the WITW salarymen had been on half time ever since Eckleschafft-Böd had forced Mrs. Anger to cut the editorial budget for everything except celebrity news, so in reality it was more like three finished pieces every eight weeks.

The ugliness—and the boringness—of this prose resides not just in its habitual lapse into acronyms, but in its lowest-common-denominator phrasing. The mixed registers, the mad and fiery powders of American discourse, offer the novelist great prizes and useful explosions. Norman Rush, for instance, produces a vitally peculiar prose, which superbly combines near-pretentiousness with slightly off-key usages. Like Wallace, he enjoys dislocating theoretical or literary or abstract language and reinserting it into conversational prose and free indirect style: "It looked like the universal conspiracy of women, stanza nine billion, on the face of it." Or this: "He hated the slings and arrows of staircase wisdom." Or this: "I was manic and global. Everything was a last straw. I went up the hill on passivity and down again." This could not be anything but American prose. But it is also recognizably a human idiom, because Rush grounds his stylistic idiosyncracies in the idiosyncracies of his characters. Wallace too often deprives himself of this human element, either because his subject is empty culture rather than the full individual, or because, on those occasions when his subject is indeed an individual, he seems peculiarly intent on obstructing individual communication.

TAKE THE BOOK'S TITLE STORY, a forty-seven-page exercise in unreliable narration. A colorless married man, a mere integer at his workplace—he is an "Assistant Systems Supervisor" for a company "which provided out-sourced data and document storage facilities and systems for a number of small- and mid-sized insurance providers in the Mid-Atlantic region"—tells us about the trouble that he is having in his marriage. Or rather, he fails to tell us about it; instead he tells us about his snoring problem. His wife has begun to wake at night, violently accusing her hapless mate of disturbing her with his infernal snoring. The man is convinced that he does not snore: "I do, of course, have my personal faults, as do all or most husbands; but 'snoring' during the year's cold weather months (like most, my hay fever is seasonal or, more technically, an 'Auto-immune system' response to certain cases of canicular pollen) is not one of them."

Unreliable narration is the name given to this kind of storytelling, the smudged hermeneutics whereby it is our task as readers to puzzle out the gaps and the slippages of a first-person account that knows less than it thinks it knows about itself. In this story, Wallace lets us see that the real problem between husband and wife is not the snoring, but a deeper mistrust of which this has become the casus belli. The husband's inability to see this deeper problem, and his pedantic fixation on the question of whether he does indeed snore or not, is clearly part of the very marital difficulty that he is evading, and the reader is allowed to piece this knowledge together. There is also a suggestion that the husband may have a fantasy relationship with an invented daughter, and—at the

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end of the story—that the husband may in fact have been dreaming the entire narrative while in bed.

Wallace hardly needed these further elements of unreliability. But these are not the real problems with the story. The real problem is that Wallace goes out of his way to make the story almost unreadable. Not content with making the narrator facetiously unreliable, he makes him repellently fussy and preening. He gives him a style that resembles a bad parody of late Henry James. Thus the husband has a tic of putting many of his words in quotation marks, and of redundantly repeating certain words: "my wife's original or 'maiden' name.... I gripped the small table's 'burled' or beveled sides in a show of distress...."

The pomposity of this narrator has disastrous results for the story. What might have been an affecting and genuinely ironic domestic tale, about a man's comic-pathetic inability to read correctly the warning signs in his marriage, becomes instead a fantastic and repellent exercise through which the reader can barely drag himself. Moreover, the hideousness of the husband's voice stacks the cards against him, precluding any possibility of sympathetic identification. "Look at this pedantic little idiot," Wallace seems to be saying, "which we can tell by looking at his absurd manner of speaking." So irony is starved to sarcasm, and sympathy to voyeurism. It is literally impossible for the reader to enter the story; Wallace has sealed all the gates.

WALLACE IS GREATLY GIFTED, but he has a *curious* kind of autism: it is as if he forgets that the voices who tell his stories are also humans whose presence might or might not be pleasurable to encounter. And there is a further problem. Despite the numbing pedantry of the narrator's style in this story, it too often resembles Wallace's own numbing pedantry of style. In the following passage, the narrator tells us of sitting with his stepfather-in-law at the local golf club:

> The Raritan Club's distinctive escutcheon and motto, for instance, appeared both to recede and come into an almost excruciant focus on "the Hole" 's opposite wall, beneath a perceptually tiny stuffed tarpon whose every imbricate scale seemed outlined or limned in almost "Photo realist" detail.... I gripped the small maple table's "burled" or beveled sides in a show of distress....

Now does "beneath a perceptually tiny stuffed tarpon whose every imbricate scale" sound like an Assistant Systems Supervisor talking, or does it sound like David Foster Wallace? In the same story, the narrator refers to "a career beverage waitress," a funny and smart locution, but also closer to DFW than to the ASS (ah, so that's what this man is!), and delivers himself of this opinion about a man's beard: "Jack Vivien (whose circumoral balbo or 'Van Dyke' was, admittedly, frankly and incongruously 'merkinesque' or pudendal in appearance)...." Here is the familiar, vaguely sophomoric, knowing young man's tone, always an adjective ahead of his readers ("circumoral" is a neologism). It leads us straight back to Wallace, as indeed do all the "voices" in this collection.

There is really only one voice in this book, and it belongs to the writer whose weakest piece here, "Another Pioneer," is a twenty-three-page shaggy-dog story whose only apparent raison d'être is to deploy the following words: "albinistic," "melanistic," "thanatophilic," "ptotic," "trypanosomic," "hemean," "omphalic," "catastatic," "malefic," "extrorse," "protasis." Ironically enough, the intrusion into the husband's narrative of Wallace's own distinctive signature as a stylist would matter less if Wallace had not made the husband so distinctive a "stylist" in the first place, with his drab pedantry and endless reformulating of pet phrases.

II.

LIKE ALL IMMERSION NOVELISTS, Wallace is digressive. One might say that the great problem with digression, as a literary mode, is that the only way to experience the aura of the digressive is to endure digression itself. The shaggy-dog story is excruciating precisely because it is shaggy; and alas, that is also the only way to experience its excruciating shagginess. For many readers, this is too high a price to pay. Likewise, the great limitation of immersion is that the only way it can represent something is by embodying it rather than by gesturing toward it.

The original digressionist is Laurence Sterne, that master of the shaggy-dog story, or "Irish bull," and David Foster

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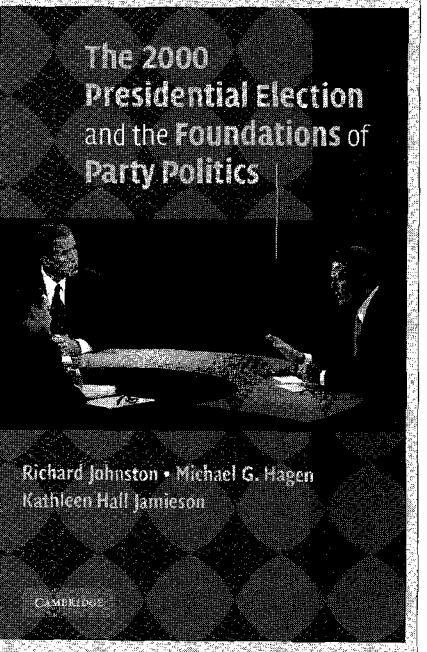
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Wallace owes more than a little to that writer: the bulbous comic sentences, the manic listing, the spiralling footnotes (*Infinite Jest* has more than one hundred pages of them), the playing around with voices, the self-referentiality, the insistent and even relentless "comedy," the cod-scholarly interest in jargon and technical discourses—all this can be found in *Tristram Shandy*. Thomas Pynchon is the great American Sternean, and Wallace has also learned a good deal from him. T. S. Eliot's advice about the importance of "relevant intensity" in good prose undergoes almost an inversion in the hands of such writers. Irrelevant intensity becomes a motor of the prose, a generator of the comedy and loose abundance.

But another channel flows into Wallace's style, and this is the Nabokovian-Updikean influence. Those stylists, Flaubert's children all, miss no detail, and are constantly fondling their lusters. Valéry complained of Flaubert's style that "there is always room for one more detail." Nabokov and Updike are very fine precisionists, but their styles at times freeze detail into a cult of itself. Aestheticism is the great risk here, and also an unnatural exaggeration of the noticing eye: thus Updike logically terminates in the psycho-pointillism of Harold Brodkey or the micro-realism of Nicholson Baker, in which the tiniest swirls of dust or the sound of a dishwasher receive elaborate, luxurious discrimination. The Nabokov who writes, "An elderly flower-girl, with carbon eyebrows and a painted smile, nimbly slipped the plump torus of a carnation into the buttonhole of an intercepted stroller whose left jowl accentuated its royal fold as he glanced downward sideways at the coy insertion of the flower," becomes the Updike who notices the rain on a window thus: "Its panes were strewn with drops that as if by amoebic decision would abruptly merge and break and jerkily run downward, and the window screen, like a sampler half-stitched, or a crossword puzzle invisibly solved, was inlaid erratically with minute, translucent tesserae of rain."

One of the reasons that Wallace always sounds like himself, even when he is ventriloquizing someone else, is that this Nabokovian-Updikean micro-realist is too often showing his hand. Nabokov and Updike are more lyrical writers than Wallace; he adds a mathematical precisionism to their fanatical observing. The narrator of "The Soul Is Not a Smithy" recalls a traumatic experience in school by way of telling us his school daydream. He spends his hours in the classroom staring out the window:

> All of the school building's windows had a reticulate wire mesh built directly into the glass in order to make the window harder to break with an errant dodgeball or vandal's hurled stone.... The wire mesh, which divided the window into 84 small squares with an additional row of 12 slender rectangles where the first vertical line of mesh nearly abutted the window's right border....

Terry Schmidt, of "Mister Squishy," rather implausibly notices that "the conference room's carpeting was magenta pile in which wheels left symmetrically distended impressions when one or more of the men adjusted their excecutive swivel chairs slightly to reposition their legs or their bodies' relation to the table itself." And recall that the useless narrator of "Oblivion," the Assistant Systems Supervisor, noticed the "perceptually tiny stuffed tarpon whose every imbricate scale seemed outlined," and in the same story notices of his stepfather-in-law's wrist how "thin, sallow and, as it were escharotic or flaky the flesh of his left wrist and hand in the air appeared." Such writing always veers uneasily close to self-congratulation—see what pearls I can find in a grain of sand!—and is actually a distance away from deep noticing. Compare, for instance, Bellow's beautiful observation, in *Seize the Day*, as Tommy Wilhelm takes "the big but light elbow" of old Rappaport in his younger hand. There an entire process of aging and mortality has been feelingly compacted into five short words, and the reader jumps with recognition, as he cannot when being cleverly taught the word "escharotic": yes, we say to ourselves, "big but light," that is just what an old man's protruding knobbly elbow is like.

Sternean digression, combined with Nabokovian micro-realism, is then further inflected by Wallace's great investment in various forms of unreliable narration. The total effect—the aggregate of all this authorial obstruction—is often intolerable, though I suspect this comes as no news to Wallace, and may even afford him a shivery postmodern satisfaction at a job properly done. One could say that a definition of unreliable narration in Wallace is that his narrators do not realize how boring they are: his fiction represents voice without personhood.

ABOVE ALL, HIS IMMERSIONist's willingness to saturate his fictions in the germs that he is documenting makes them sick themselves. One sees this in the book's most engaging story, "The Suffering Channel," which closes the collection. It concerns a New York magazine called *Style*, and because the offices of this magazine are on the sixteenth floor of 1 World Trade Center, and because we are told of one intern that "she had ten weeks to live" and that another will survive "the tragedy by which *Style* would enter history two months hence," we know that this is a September 11 story, and we steel ourselves accordingly. A writer does not choose this material lightly; he knows its gravity may have a way of judging his lightness. And so the story is something of a test case for Wallace.

At *Style*, a contributing writer named Skip Atwater is trying to pitch a story about an Indiana man called Brint Moltke, who can produce perfectly sculpted shit out of his ass. Isn't this a new kind of art? Atwater goes to Indiana to interview Moltke and his domineering, obese wife. He feels the need to warn the couple that exposure will bring great celebrity, but perhaps much awkwardness. Moltke's wife manages the negotiations; her husband is silent. In New York, the glamorous young fashion interns start referring to the piece as "the miraculous poo story." Meanwhile, in Chicago, a new cable TV channel has started up, named "The Suffering Channel," in which snatches of videotape of people suffering terrible experiences play in a continuous twenty-four-hour loop. The unfortunate Mr. Moltke will eventually, at story's end, be filmed excreting on The Suffering Channel.

The Swiftian side of Wallace's moralism is often on display in this story, which has passages of vivid, harsh, finely controlled writing. The emptiness of the Manhattan magazine world is an easy quarry for Wallace's spade, and he digs very happily. The tale's meaning is not exactly subtle: a few months before real suffering will engulf New York, the media world is just fiddling with shit. That the media is itself shit is made usefully explicit, when we are reminded that most of *Style* readers read the magazine in the bathroom. So: we are what we read.

But the story, all ninety pages of it,

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like all the others in this book, acutely fails to move the reader. The story ends with such abruptness that suspicion stirs that it was a half-finished novel that ran out of energy. It hardly helps that, once again, Wallace mocks his characters rather than comprehends them: the interns and scribes at *Style* are all paper-thin New York women of terrifying superficiality. Wallace's decision to make the Indiana man's wife a stock Midwesterner, a woman of surpassing and menacing obesity, writes off the only possibility for human sympathy. So the story takes place in the familiar space of Wallace's fiction: a world voided of human substance. And then a revealing and deeply symptomatic thing happens. Wallace tries to inject pathos, and fails. Coming out of his Indiana motel room one day, while negotiations with the Moltkes are at a delicate stage, Skip Atwater almost steps into a pile of shit, and on a piece of paper outside his door, the words "Help Me" have been formed in human excreta.

It should be a significant turning point in the story: we assume that Moltke is desperately communicating with the journalist, letting him know that his wife is bullying him into an exposure that he secretly dreads. But the scene has, instead, a giggly, juvenile weightlessness to it. Wallace never thematically develops this new information: in the ten pages that follow, and close the story, this cry for help is never referred to again. It is just dropped. And observe what Wallace does with this message:

> He [Skip] knew that great force of will would be required to try to imagine the various postures and contractions involved in producing the phrase, its detached and plumb straight underscoring, the tiny and perfectly formed quotation marks.... In a sense, the content of the message was obliterated by the overwhelming fact of its medium and implied mode of production. The phrase terminated neatly at the second E's serif; there was no tailing off or spotting.

"There was no tailing off or spotting": how is it possible to read these words and not assume that Wallace is sniggering? The sentence about "the various postures and contractions involved in producing the phrase"—how can this be anything but a hideous lapse of tone on Wallace's part? At the scene on which the story might pivot, we have a pile of shit, and a journalist—and a writer, Wallace himself—who is busy admiring the way the shit produces a spotless "E's serif"! But Wallace cannot have it both ways. Either this is a cry for help, with some meaning and implication for the story at hand, or it is just a great big joke. It seems to be a great big joke: first, because it seems incredible that if the man really wanted to communicate with Skip, he would not choose a more direct route, such as picking up the phone or using a pen; and second, because Wallace will not deal with the message as if it matters, as if it has human weight. I see no way to read the passage except as a catastrophic abrogation of authorial responsibility. In a stroke, Wallace's story itself becomes a piece of shit, an unmiraculous poo, a piece of jokey installation art that is ostensibly about grave matters—9/11, the long, dirty colon that is celebrity journalism—but is actually incapable of making good on its claim to gravity.

Here, at the end of *Oblivion*, we reach the culmination of Wallace's long exercises in immersion: we have had our faces rubbed in shit only at the cost of the story itself becoming a piece of shit. Might it not be that in his heart Wallace knows this? For what does this little passage dramatize but that writing is shit, and that for some writing "the content of the message [is] obliterated by the overwhelming fact of its medium"? The content of the message obliterated by the fact of its own medium: is there a better or more sadly accurate description of Wallace's own talented obliterations? ■

Elisa New
Farewell, New England

HAWTHORNE: A LIFE
By Brenda Wineapple
(Alfred A. Knopf, 509 pp., $30)

"DEEP AS DANTE." THAT is how Melville described Hawthorne in 1847, in his famous essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses." Attributing Hawthorne's genius to his "strong New England roots," Melville marveled at this writer who "expands and deepens down, the more I contemplate him." Later generations of admirers have agreed that Hawthorne was, whatever else, profound. Robert Lowell's cameo of Hawthorne, written in 1964 from his new post at Harvard, echoes Melville's judgment of Hawthorne as a writer as much gifted as afflicted with the moodiness that Melville called "the hypos." "Head/bent down, brooding, brooding": Hawthorne's intensity augurs not only Lowell's own but that of all New England literature, whose force, as Melville suggested, derived "from its appeals to that Calvinist Sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin."

Not accidentally, Lowell's Hawthorne, the descendant of Melville's, was influenced also by the school of literary criticism then in full flower at Harvard, which made the literature of New England synonymous with American literature and any interpreter of the Puritan tradition an expositor of the nation's soul. This was the criticism that called the romance, rather than the realist novel, the quintessential American genre; that identified lonely individualism as the hero's natural habiliment; that approved a tenebrous chiaroscuro as the defining style of American civilization. Magisterial, melancholy, and utterly male, it was a grand old era of American criticism that made Hawthorne into our Dante.

There was Harry Levin, canonizing Melville's assertion that Hawthorne abounded in "blackness, ten times black" to write *Powers of Blackness*, a paean to sensibility tuned migrainally tight. There was F. O. Matthiessen, heralding an American "Renaissance" not gilded and exuberant but guilty and vexed. For Matthiessen, Hawthorne exemplified the "problem of the Artist as New Englander," "A Haunted Mind." And there was Perry Miller himself, the professor of

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the New England mind, asserting not long before he died that Hawthorne's fiction expressed the "deepest passions of the continent." Convinced by the experiences of the Great War, World War II, and the Cold War that life was essentially treacherous, these were men who named evil where they saw it and drank it down neat.

For these critics, the literature of New England was icy truth's native spring. Only at Harvard could the phrase "American civilization" connote both a stage in world history and an undergraduate major. Out of the lecture hall and into secondary curricula and the civic realm these men dispatched an old idea: that America's flinty, redoubtable spirit fulfills itself in acts of arduous discovery. Rigorous scholarly disciplines and ambitious works of art, in alliance with statecraft, wrest out the meaning of America. As Robert Frost would put it at John F. Kennedy's inauguration, the country that had begun flat, "artless," "unstoried," and "unenhanced" was still "realizing" itself. Never mind that Frost's allusions may have been as obscure to his listeners as more recent allusions to John Winthrop may have been to those at Ronald Reagan's funeral. And never mind that those assembled would only half hear—and of the part heard only half understand—what he said. This was, in fact, his poem's point, and the point of the New England tradition that nurtured him. Like those gathered aboard the *Arabella* with Winthrop, like those auditors whom Hawthorne gathers to hear Arthur Dimmesdale's masterpiece, his Election Day sermon in *The Scarlet Letter*, Frost assumed that his auditors were still realizing themselves, still "in-progress" too.

What Frost brought to the podium at the Capitol was Hawthorne's vision of America as an endlessly interpretable symbol. Americanness, in this view, is itself an art: its ultimate meaning could be experienced as a kind of literary depth. Nor does Hawthorne ever disappoint in the depth department. Live with him long enough, and one comes to crave what he offers, to return again and again to the pull of mystery, moral obligation, and interpretive toil in his fiction. The narrator of *The Scarlet Letter*, his greatest work, demonstrates the method when, picking up a scrap of scarlet cloth, he reports feeling a "sympathetic throb." The throb is crucial, for it alerts us to "deep meaning ... most worthy of interpretation ... subtly communicating itself to [his] sensibilities," and moreover, to a meaning that "evade[s] the analysis of [his] mind. The reader who imagines that the "A" which interpreter holds in his hand stands for something simple like "adultery" will be risking a really obtuse reduction. As if the alphabet of human feeling could be reduced to a single stigmatizing letter! As if the contents of a heart could be made visible on a bodice!

Truth's fullness exceeds its inflamed and merely proximate sign. Thus the "scarlet letter" is not only Hester's public brand, and her lover Arthur's secret one. It is also America's, and Art's, and Allegory's. It is nothing less than Adam's—from whose fall, Hawthorne admits, we sinned all. But it is Adam, too, from whose expulsion from Eden, Eve by his side, we learn tenderness, devotion, and care. The office of the A, and of Hawthorne's own allegorical method, is to indicate the depths of our common imperfection, and so to alert us to that sacred self—the "inmost me," as he called it—that we are bound to protect in each other.

THERE IS SCARCELY A TALE IN Hawthorne that does not show such multi-layered depths, such scouring moral comprehensiveness. Consider the story of the young bridegroom Aylmer in "The Birthmark." Aylmer is an ambitious young scientist who one day finds himself unable to abide the birthmark on his wife Georgiana's cheek, and whose quest to restore her perfection leads to her eventual murder. Pursuing an absolute, trading life for truth, Aylmer is Hawthorne's version of the Faustian knower, a figure of fresh salience in the nineteenth-century age of science. And Hawthorne's Faust is a Frankenstein, his intellectual pride and rational drive carrying him past mere sin into active evil.

And he is still more. Aylmer begins as a man who loves his work, but he becomes a case study in ambition's disordering power. Love and work may balance each other, but Aylmer is a workaholic whose pursuit of a single goal makes all life into a degraded adjunct of the self. What is most uncanny about Aylmer is his precocious but unmistakably American "individualism." Machine-like in will, he is capable, in Flannery O'Connor's phrase, of "forward and reverse," but not of anything tender. And this single-mindedness makes him also the progenitor to the whole array of hypermasculine types who come to populate subsequent American fiction: Henry James's priapic Goodwood, Henry Adams's Dynamo, Faulkner's brutal Sutpen, and all the dull stiffs, strutters, and ruthless titans and tyros since. These man-machines have, rather than strength, force—a force which, as Hawthorne uses Aylmer to show, is inveterately at odds with beauty, that fresh and delicate thing not exclusively but so often the property of women.

Tales such as "The Birthmark," "Artist of the Beautiful," "Wakefield," and "Rappaccini's Daughter" show Hawthorne first in making this beauty the outward sign of the "inmost me"; first, too, in using his art to instruct pity for those wearing such a precious property abroad in the world; and finally pity too for all those confined within institutions of culture (marriage; the professions; public office, with its pomp and dignity) negligent of nature's prior claims. Which is to say, pity for us all—but especially for women and wives.

For if Aylmer is a sort of Dr. Frankenstein dreaming toward the day that he will be Dr. Strangelove, he is also a very bad husband, and every kind of bad husband. His drive to change his wife, or to kill what he does not like in her, illustrates that species of male narcissism that loves its desire more than the object of its desire. Theorists of pornography could do worse than study the lethal erotics of this husband who, in order to "cure" his wife, has her installed in a perfumed boudoir where he may "study" her compelling, obsession-making "ugliness." Moreover, as Georgiana's birthmark takes the shape of a tiny hand, a sign of birth itself, Aylmer's war on the birthmark shows itself to be an intellectual assault on female reproductive power. His quest for beauty kills the woman and the child.

Is this not quite enough for one story to accomplish? But there is more. Hawthorne's tale also tracks the evacuation of Georgiana's pride and self-esteem, her growing dependence on Aylmer's approval, her masochistic internalization of her husband's disgust. Meanwhile, as Georgiana is sacrificed to her husband's career, Hawthorne explores, too, how little protection the institution of bourgeois marriage affords women. The insularity of the marriage bond, to which high idealism attaches, makes marriage a perfect laboratory for exploitative cru-

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elty and, the allegory hints, a bit of a mad experiment. Here and in other tales, Hawthorne leads us to question a world in which marriage, the primary institution of social relation, cannot protect social relation, and so to guard more zealously the human connections that we have. Intimate relations with others, and the responsibilities that we assume to the social systems that protect us all—these, Hawthorne adjures, are what keep us from "losing our place in the universe forever." The man who thinks first and feels later is condemned to become, like Aylmer, an Adam in free fall: a veritable "Outcast of the Universe."

With stories such as "The Birthmark" to remind us of his method, it is no use gainsaying Hawthorne's depth, or questioning the essentially Calvinist and New England materials on which he draws. The sea was Melville's Harvard College and Yale. "Innate Depravity and Original Sin" were Hawthorne's. And yet, as Brenda Wineapple demonstrates in her splendid biography, Hawthorne knew also the limitations of the religion of profundity. The sentry of surfaces, of present history, of the day-to-day, he was wary of anything radical, and suspicious of the manifold forms of self-regard that New Englanders confused with the care of the soul. Melville was not wrong when he said that "the rich and rare distilment" of Hawthorne's "spicy and slowly-oozing heart" was ineluctably moral. What makes Wineapple's Hawthorne so interesting, and so many of the insights in her book so fresh, is just how ill at ease with his own profundity, how much of two minds about darkness, and how solidly and even ploddingly devoted to moderation Hawthorne really was.

His choice of a best friend illustrates this humane complexity. More comfortable among mediocrities than geniuses, he chose not the passionate Melville, not the gentle Longfellow, but the potato-faced, shallow, loyal Franklin Pierce. Hawthorne liked the cozily married, the gainfully employed, and, when possible, the advantageously connected. He tended to shun the company of the lonely and the lightning-struck, and he was wary of intense believers and unbelievers alike. He made a few notable exceptions for those who called themselves Transcendentalists, but the actual "school of Hawthorne," in Richard Brodhead's nice phrase, mixed select New Englanders with various prodigals and democrats, and even a few New Yorkers. A temperamentally eclectic group, Hawthorne's intimates may be said to have been united most by a certain resistance to New England pieties, New England proprietarinesses, and New England politics.

Wineapple's biography is at its best when she lets the ironic, caustic, and sometimes reactive currents of Hawthorne's personality trouble our sense of his depths, showing a temperament frequently at cross-purposes with its milieu. The perspective that Wineapple sheds, via Hawthorne, on the New England Abolitionist community is especially striking. Hawthorne frequently found his neighbors absurd. But around the issue of abolition, and later the issue of war, their weakness for absolute measures disgusted him. The tolerance of violence that Whittier, Thoreau, Melville, and eventually Lincoln himself endorsed, Hawthorne stubbornly refused. Emerson might breathe piously on the eve of John Brown's execution that Brown "will make the gallows as glorious as the cross," but this endorsement of a man who had butchered innocents in cold blood seemed to Hawthorne evidence of how companionably bad faith could live with good causes. Hawthorne's own flat reaction to Brown's execution was that "never was a man more justly hanged." His further admission to taking "intellectual satisfaction ... in requital of [Brown's] preposterous miscalculation" sums up his conviction that overreaching is always dangerous, and the pursuit of principle before persons frequently criminal.

For Hawthorne, the "grandiose miscalculation of possibilities"—the moral hazard afflicting all men since Adam—is the true serpent in the garden. Certainty breeds sin, and too much faith in ultimate depths (as opposed to delicate surfaces) can sharpen belief to a dangerous edge, making it into a weapon. No conviction is insusceptible to being overdone. Remorse taken too far eats at the social fabric. ("It gnaws me! It gnaws me!" says the morbid sufferer of "The Bosom Serpent," setting loose his neurosis on an unsuspecting world.) Too much patriotic independence becomes mob cruelty (as innocent Robin recognizes, beholding his tarred and feathered

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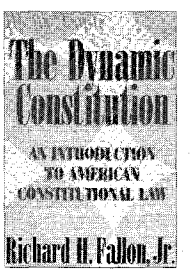

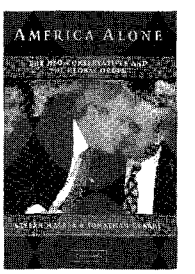

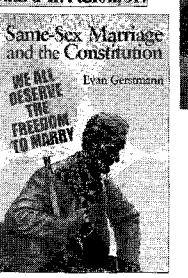

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kinsman Major Molineux). Too much love of children renders them vulnerable hothouse specimens (the fate of Rappaccini's daughter). Hawthorne regularly subjects the passions and the obsessions and the *idées fixes* of all his characters to contact with the everyday, the trivial, and the transient, and also to the needs and claims of other people. Those who respond well to his lessons in moderation he repays with long, uneven, and compromised lives. These, like Milton's Adam and Eve, he allows "hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow" to take "through Eden ... thir solitary way." The rest he lets go to the Devil.

Worldliness, rather than depth; history, rather than time; the contingent, rather than the transcendent—these, Wineapple shows, were as much a part of Hawthorne's moral temper as the taxonomy of fall, sin, love, and salvation that was his New England inheritance. Wineapple's Hawthorne is readier to serve up poetic justice than we had seen him before; more a skeptic, and more dyspeptic, too. When the priggish Hilda marries the cold Kenyon in *The Marble Faun*, or when Goodman Brown leaves his clinging wife Faith (in pink ribbons, no less) to keep an assignation with Satan, Wineapple's Hawthorne is disinclined to wring his hands. What, after all, can one expect of a Goodman?

Lucky, then, for this Goodman that though he dispatches himself to the Devil, he has his steadfast Faith and his town to return to. That cosmic damnation can, in the provincial setting (marriage is the most provincial setting of all), sometimes get spun as damned foolery is, in Hawthorne's account, to the great credit of the community. Communities guard the fallible from the ultimate danger—though not from the laughter that plays a key role in many of Hawthorne's darkest tales. Hawthorne brilliantly used the "sketch" to administer the reality check of humor to his more self-absorbed characters. The distance between the lonely sufferer and his salvation is often that between the dark woods and the workaday town. In the town, if he is lucky, someone might laugh at him. With excess running so high in New England's dark woods, it is best, Hawthorne reckoned, to have a town around.

INDEED, SO MUCH OF THE GRIST FOR Hawthorne's skepticism was provincially grown that Wineapple has written a very funny study of Hawthorne in his New England milieu. The archness that Hawthorne adopts when he writes, in the "Custom House Sketch," of Concord's most out-there Transcendentalist, "Even the Old Inspector was desirable, as a change of appetite, to a man who had known Alcott," works to set the book's tone, and so the reader's expectations for much tongue-in-cheek fun. It is delightful, with Wineapple as our guide, to observe New England's favorite son lifting his handsome eyebrows at the parochial sanctimony of this New England worthy or that, as he ducks into a doorway, or into a brown study, or up a gangplank, to escape some raffish, churchly denizen of the Cambridge/Concord/Berkshire elite. Wineapple expertly uses Hawthorne's point of regard to disclose the chronic humorlessness of reforming Boston, persistent through the generations, even as she captures that blend of flamboyance, wit, and practical worldliness that all of Hawthorne's favorite people possessed.

With a terrific ear for the telling quotation, Wineapple shows how Hawthorne's habitual reserve and ironic distance helped him to appreciate the merits of those he really liked. In a letter from Brook Farm on the subject of Margaret Fuller's cow, Hawthorne remarks to his fiancée that the "transcendental heifer" was as "apt to kick over the milk pail" as its owner. A touch of malice slightly curdles Hawthorne's sketch of the flamboyant and rather ample Fuller—an intellectual whose "conversations" with women she played for maximum effect with theatrical velvets, raised chairs, and such. Yet he clearly esteems Fuller, who, like her bovine namesake, gave as good as she got. Another favorite was James Fields, the ebullient publisher and *saloniste* who, along with younger wife Annie, published Hawthorne's books "à la Steam Engine." Buoying Hawthorne's spirits with his "uncorked faith" while seconding his distrust of "damned female scribblers," Fields repressed moping in Hawthorne's company but was sensibly miffed on Hawthorne's behalf that "the writer of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is getting to be a millionaire."

Poor, infatuated Melville gushed with too much love for the restrained Hawthorne ever to requite it. Both Emerson and Thoreau lacked the irony that he liked in friends. But Wineapple's own wicked jollity is of the kind that Hawthorne would have found hard to resist. She impales the callowness of George Ripley's scheme to sidestep politics and jump-start society from scratch in West Roxbury on a drolly innocent and mock-ingenuous phrase: "utopia on a pretty farm." Likewise, she titles the chapter treating Hawthorne's stay at the Old Manse in Concord "Beautiful Enough," thereby demystifying the period when, for cheap honeymoon lodgings and a good writing desk, Hawthorne put up with Concord's worthies ("bores of a very intense water")—until he and his bride were evicted for nonpayment of rent. With Wineapple as guide, the reader of *Hawthorne: A Life* sees a world not just "blackness, ten times black" but flickering with percipience and the ironic perspective.

THE MATTER THAT MOST DIScomfited his New England colleagues, Hawthorne's politics, Wineapple is thus able to explain more satisfactorily than anyone has before. Hawthorne joined the Democratic Party in college, at Bowdoin, when it appealed to all sorts of boys impatient of New England's whiggish, seignorial mien. Melville, Whitman, and others were also moved by this party in which young men could find common cause, through the Young America movement, with youthful '48ers worldwide. Such Democrats took the rough Jackson over the refined Adams any day. They preferred the moral scrubbing of a spirited editorial to that New England staple, Sunday's homiletics served up fresh on newsprint. They liked Manhattan's downtown rowdies more than the landed upstaters remaking Albany into a kind of Boston (without Congregationalism, but with furs). Eventually this was the same party, its spokesman the brilliant but quixotic John O'Sullivan, that called expansion west our Manifest Destiny, free soil a white man's sacred right, and, in turn, states' rights the working man's protection from the patrician North.

When others chose to transfer their political loyalties, Hawthorne did not. If it was not pure expediency that kept him a Democrat, Wineapple shows that it was not spotless principle either. Hawthorne's friendship with Pierce, including his dependence on party sinecures for livelihood, went hand in hand with tastes that ran so deep as to imitate principles. Membership in the Democratic Party provided a perch for an oppositionalism of temperament that craved an

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alternative to the Cambridge/Concord/Berkshire axis of dreamy cerebralism and parochial smugness. Democratic partisanship was a symptom of Hawthorne's allergy to his native New England.

Treating this aspect of Hawthorne's character with about the same mix of justice and mercy that Hawthorne regularly deploys, Wineapple does not scruple to let ironies sift down on Hawthorne and his clan. No one could find much good to say about Franklin Pierce's dim record as president, but Wineapple, poker-faced, pulls up a chair and a notepad and lets Hawthorne try. "Pierce had fully risen to what the office demanded," he rationalizes. "True, Pierce had not risen beyond what the office demanded." And she is deliciously waspish on the Hawthornes' marriage, and on Hawthorne's "dearest beloved" and "Dove," Sophia Hawthorne, née Peabody. Wineapple can hardly blame Hawthorne for adoring Sophia's sexual enthusiasm, staunch devotion, and preference for a cozy night at home. But this does not oblige her to neglect all the art that Sophia pours into being adorable. Yet whatever Sophia's deviations from perfect frankness, the marriage that follows was remarkable for loyalty and compatibility, and the devotion of the couple did not diminish as middle age cut down the frequent episodes of intercourse that Hawthorne called "blissful interviews."

THIS IS A BIOGRAPHY TO SAVOR. Wineapple's publisher had the good sense to let her include also a complete album of the family cameos. Those wonderful scissored-out black shadows, mounted on white, serve to reinforce Wineapple's shrewdest perception: that the timeless and immortal Hawthorne—Melville's Dante—was very much a man circa 1850. As he was himself averse to those of overly delicate sensibility, his art was finally transcendent in its impatience with transcendence. Not surprisingly, then, she also offers fine readings of Hawthorne's major works, correcting the critical tendency to let Hawthorne's depths pull all analysis full fathom five. In Wineapple's readings, the fictions keep their feet on the earth and in neighborly converse with Hawthorne's densely human, inveterately historical existence.

That compromise is human, and extremity malign; that a mortal's place is between heaven and hell, and that earth is, as Frost later put it, "the right place for love"—these were the articles of Hawthorne's artistic faith. Here, Hawthorne surmised, fiction could help, for fiction was a zone of temperate relations. Placed between a reader and a writer, between hard facts and what imagination wrought, fiction might school us in relations less drastic, more flexible, than we may think we need. In fiction, as Hawthorne writes,

> it may be pardonable to imagine that a friend, a kind and apprehensive, though not the closest friend, is listening to our talk; and then, a native reserve being thawed by this genial consciousness, we may prate of the circumstances that lie around us, and even of ourself, but still keep the inmost Me behind its veil. To this extent and within these limits, an author, methinks, may be autobiographical, without violating either the reader's rights or his own.

When we first read *The Scarlet Letter* in school, we tend to over-identify or to under-identify with its two chief protagonists, thus repeating, by mirroring in reverse, the sin of those who will not let the sinner veil her face for shame. Who, when she first reads *The Scarlet Letter*, does not cheer Hester's bare-knuckled resistance to the Puritan oligarchy, her disciplined, cerebral radicalism, her passionate readiness to chuck it all, flee, and leave America for Europe, sickly lover in tow? Run away! Fight the power! To thine own self be true! Hester in her A is our perfect heroine of the id, the consummate model of adolescent rebellion; and Dimmesdale, in this version, is the worst kind of establishment adult. What excuse has Hester's lover, we ask, but hypocrisy, ambition, and a weak-willed need to please to transmute his private into public sin? What right has he, we ask, to imagine public service can ever substitute for naked confession on the public scaffold?

Precisely the right, Hawthorne's book counsels, of any fallen mortal. The fact of our common imperfection seals our obligation to each other as well as guarantees our fundamental equality, so extending to every person the right to keep some matters private. The community has no right to our individual sins, for what can it do with them that we could not ourselves do better? Exposing transgressions to the common gaze may fix, petrify, and objectify what the heart might prompt to new, warm growth.

Paradoxically, it is this impartial protection that civil society and routine existence within a larger public provide. The Eagle of the Republic over the Salem Custom House enfolds Hester's and Arthur's trauma—and Hawthorne's own traumas—under its institutional wig, as the living community enfolds all traumas in an ambiguity, a social veil and a web of social relations, that protects innermost selves. The Eagle, the alphabet, the pulpit—all institutions of custom—offer to individuals general, disinterested, and thus highly civilized protections. In their very ambiguity and iridescence of weave, these media preserve the interpretability of the world, and in this way its diversity. Full of possibilities, the world is fallen, but it is free. Hawthorne's Democratic politics may have been in some ways rather small, but the claims he makes for the artist in democracy are large. He was, perhaps, America's first great liberal artist.

In Hawthorne's work, in sum, art and the artist assume highly responsible regulatory functions within the civic sphere: they find deep and friendly meaning in social institutions, and they

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deprive certain attractive characters of their deepest, most grandiose, and most suspect desires. Beware, they teach, of getting what you want.

IT WAS A SOUND PHILOSOPHY for Hawthorne to hold, Wineapple reminds us, given the frustration that so often attended his own high hopes. The author of the most perfect of American books had plenty of practice with compromise and making do. The year 1851, in the aftermath of his dismissal from the Custom House and the publication of his masterpiece, found Hawthorne alarmingly poor and living with his family in a gussied-up shanty in the Berkshires. *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne's study of the rigors of the American economy, was written in these straitened circumstances. "Thou didst much amiss, to marry a husband who cannot keep thee like a lady," Hawthorne admitted to the wife laying carpet over rough boards.

The House of the Seven Gables now treated the humiliations, especially the economic ones, that are the special province of the elderly, while also hinting at those anxieties that come to live with the middle-aged when they realize that "in this republican country, someone is always at the drowning point." What is to save anyone from starvation in individualist America? On the morning on which the book opens, one Hepzibah Pyncheon, a scraggly old hen of a woman, has finally given up on gentility and brought herself to the excruciating step of opening a "cent shop." In the course of the romance, Hepzibah will be rescued from starvation, along with her faded brother Clifford, by the appearance of two young guests: the lovely cousin Phoebe, who comes to plant vegetables in the garden and to take over the cent shop counter; and the tenant Holgrave, daguerreotypist and radical, who falls in love with Phoebe, marries her, and becomes domesticated into economic competency and meliorist politics. Young America to the rescue!

Yet even as Hawthorne shows compassion for these pinched and pitiable remnants of New England's Saving Remnant, he makes no bones about exposing the values of Hepzibah and Clifford as distinctly unbeautiful and democratically doomed. Hepzibah despises the ascendance of individualist ambition, but the prerogatives to which she clings were always the fruit of ill-gotten gains, of hereditary privilege no less avaricious for having once gone bewigged in silvery noblesse. Nor has her unhinged brother Clifford, a feeble aristocratic wreck, covered himself with glory just because, his patrimony stolen from him by fast dealing, he has lost his youth rotting in jail for another's crimes. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the New England way is democracy's high-maintenance elder relation.

BUT IT IS ALSO, MORE GENERally, the way of the world since Adam. For what can one expect of any Hepzibah or Clifford, clinging to their home, their past, and all the provenances and perquisites they have ever known? Who ever, Hawthorne inquires, truly leaves his "dwelling place," that hereditary Salem of the timid, backward-glancing heart? No one ever left by choice. Not even, as Hawthorne's next work shows, he who flees for Eden itself. *The Blithedale Romance*, an exposé of Eden, is most famous for drawing on the "most romantic episode" of Hawthorne's own life: an eighteen-month sojourn at Brook Farm. But its power derives from the questions of renewal that Hawthorne had asked in his previous two romances and which Emerson put thus: "Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the Universe?" Why, to put it another way, should not every generation discover its own America?

The price of oats in Massachusetts, for one thing. The Panic of 1838, for another. Vast class and cultural differences between those who pursue agriculture and those who revere nature. The clash of young men's ambitions. Urban alienation. Temptations to mendacity. Mechanization. The weather. And, most of all, the disordering power of sex. If the idealists of Blithedale fancy that they have found Arcadia, their pastoral retreat is actually just an exurb of Boston, their utopia an escape from modernity without originality. On sabbatical from city day jobs, they hold on to what are—there is no mistaking them!—city apartments, and they hold fast too to the complex urban lives and attachments that go with their walk-ups. On weekends, these utopians return to the city, where seamstresses from the country risk prostitution, where old men turn to drink, where operators, hucksters, and actors of all kinds purvey stimulants, escapes, forgetful dreams. Blithedale's characters are all actors playing double parts and leading secret lives. Hypersophisticated in their pursuit of innocence, they refurbish the very trees in the woods into pieds-à-terre so as to better watch themselves disport at innocence. (And disport they do. Everything in this book is tinged with sex.)

If Blithedale has its fierce partisans, and I am one of them, it is probably because even as its author mocks the callowness, the pretense, and the self-deception of his characters, he lets us feel all the giddy charm of their situation. The book draws from the same well of youthful vividness and sexual drive that powers romances from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, and even some of television's better sitcoms about young and vital friends in the city. Who are the Blithedalers but a group of twenty-somethings of mixed abilities, mixed attractiveness, and mixed motives, all out for their lusts and their careers? They are silly and, in some cases, tragically wrong about themselves; but they are hard to resist as, on the breezy hillsides and sunburnt hayricks of their utopia, they work out who they are.

The Blithedale Romance, published in 1852, was Hawthorne's last great work of art for eight years. Shortly after finishing it, Hawthorne obtained, cour-

Lord, Yours Is the Hour of Conquest, Mine to Submit

Are You the grease-backed reptile cooling in mud?
Dirty one,
all teeth and scurvy intention, what am I that hugs Your back?
(Oh what am I that's crawling?)
I do not know what I do,
forgive me. Gather me beggared like weeds against Your skin.

You are the rupture of slack ponds gone pea green. It matters nothing. Make me the slit the gator slips between.

GERI DORAN

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tesy of Pierce and the party, the post of American consul in Liverpool, which gave him modest financial security as well as opportunities to meet English writers, to travel, and to enjoy his family far from New England's suffocations. Yet it turned out that the sinecure that provided the Hawthornes a measure of security and peace also deprived him of that proximity to home which, however vexatious, was the source of his art's greatest power.

There are those who find *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne's last completed romance, a rich and estimable book. I confess that I would rather stamp passports in Liverpool, or even hazard malaria in Rome, than ever read this book again. To be sure, the materials out of which Hawthorne fashioned it were not unpromising, bearing strong resemblances to those used with such success before. *The Marble Faun* features a dark and beautiful heroine with a secret. It boasts tensions between the moldering past and the brisk and ruthless present. It has an ensemble cast of striving youth in a sexy and unsupervised setting. Its subject is art and the artist, now liberated from provincial New England and set down in Rome, a city itself a work of art. It has, in other words, as likely a mise-en-scène as any Henry James novel. Nor does the book forgo those fundamental questions of sin, social accountability, and creative self-culture that had always preoccupied this writer who, as Matthiessen claimed, exemplified "the problem of the Artist as New Englander." Not casting off from Calvinist obsession so much as returning to its source, in Rome Hawthorne might have fancied that he had found the fallen Adam of towns, the originary setting for the haunting of the New England mind.

Somehow, though, this talky book walks into a dark gallery and never comes out. Wineapple's notes show her to have assimilated much critical opinion on the book, and she has a great deal of interest to relate about Hawthorne's ideas for it. High art's relationship to vernacular practice; the romance as a genre; canon-formation; culture when it becomes national; nations when they abjure art; art when it abjures nations; inspiration versus imitation; painting's immediacy and narrative's duration: these are Hawthorne's themes in his last book, and Wineapple, always intelligent, is able to convey what he was thinking. She shows also that in the eight years in which Hawthorne toiled away at this book he made himself into a very fine docent. Contemporaries carried *The Marble Faun* to Rome with them in their trunks to use as a guidebook.

THE LAST PAGES OF WINEapple's book make sad reading. Returning to America in 1860, Hawthorne lived out the four years after the publication of *The Marble Faun* back in Concord. The country was now in the throes of the Civil War, whose noblest cause, abolition, had often shown Hawthorne its cheapest face. As the conflict approached its bloody close, Hawthorne aged fast, struggling with another unfinished romance, with his legs, with gastric agonies, and with the threat of genteel but enervating poverty. The silhouettes and photographs in Wineapple's last chapters reveal Hawthorne going portly and bent, his eyebrows, his aquiline nose, his very hat showing a sag. Wineapple allows how disconsolate and spent he was when he died, sent off on a restorative carriage ride with Pierce on May 19, 1864. For some time, he had been effectively gone; "only weariness, infinite weariness, hung on."

Hawthorne had a temperament—delicate, perceptive, and very fine—on which his region and his region's exercised soul daguerreotyped itself. His best work was achieved close to home; and yet his major writings are all explorations of the Absolute, of the danger of grasping at totality, and of the historical torques and psychological tensions that trouble and warp, but also give human face and explicability to truths far beyond human reach. He thought that selves and societies are best kept at some decent remove from themselves, extended but also protected by the symbols and the rituals that afford a measure of safe conduct to the children of Adam. Harbors, borders, houses with their insides and outs, institutions for the exchange of facts and fantasies, and of course art: all these ingenious constructions allow us shelter in our own worlds but also broadening passages into other worlds. Wherever he roamed, Hawthorne's dwelling place was New England, but his art was never so parochial a place. It occupies, instead, the liminal and highly charged zone where the psyche, cast off from its lonely foundations, risks true growth. ■

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NOT BOSTON DIARIST

Desk Jockey

LAST WEEK, A WOMAN CALLED to ask if I had received an invitation to her organization's party at the Boston convention. I told her I was not going to Boston. "Oh!" she replied, with a mixture of shock and pity. A moment ago, she had been beseeching me. Now, she was embarrassed for me. A couple days later, a reporter friend called to inquire about my convention plans. I gave the same answer and heard the same "Oh!" It was the sort of response you'd get if you begged off an invitation to go out to dinner by explaining that you couldn't afford to eat three meals a day.

PROFESSIONAL WASHINGTON HAS RELOcated to Boston for the week, yet I chose to remain behind. Well, "chose" may be a slight overstatement. My editor, for reasons that will become clear as you read on, decided not to send me. But I didn't want to go anyway. For one thing, I remain traumatized by my one previous convention experience, in Los Angeles four years ago. Conventions are often portrayed as joyous, nonstop festivals of party-hopping. In truth, they're ruthless Darwinian competitions, in which those who have attained high status, or are particularly adept at networking, gorge themselves on crab cakes and foie gras, while the socially inept are left behind to scrounge hotel vending-machine fare. The struggle is so fierce and so elemental that it consumes almost every waking moment. It is almost impossible to have a conversation with anybody without asking, or being asked, "Do you know what parties are going on tonight, and, if yes, can you get me in?" It is the closest approximation an adult can have to being in the ninth grade, and, for me, the result was eerily similar. I whiled away the evenings alone in my hotel room, reading the newspapers, periodically checking my unringing cell phone to make sure it was charged, and watching the hotel's one movie channel, which, night after night, replayed a movie about superintelligent sharks. (I can't remember if the sharks were supposed to be superintelligent by human standards or merely superintelligent by shark standards. Either way, I was sure that, if the sharks had been in L.A., they, unlike me, would have figured out how to get into the *GQ* party.)

CONVENIENTLY ENOUGH, I'VE DEVELOPED a theory justifying my opposition to convention reporting. Here it is: Reporting as a whole, while obviously necessary, is overrated. The mania over attending news-free conventions merely epitomizes a mentality that values going places and talking to people above all else. This prevalent ethos was expressed in the ur-journalism movie *All The President's Men*. Protesting the assignment of the Watergate story to young city-desk reporters, a *Washington Post* editor notes, "I have some experienced guys sitting around," prompting a devastating rebuke from his fellow editor: "You said it—sitting around."

BUT WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT SITTING around? You can learn a lot sitting behind a desk, mining the papers for interesting factual nuggets, reading political commentary from every perspective, poring through books and reports, and using the Nexis database to compile enormous stacks of newspaper stories. Most journalists scorn this kind of research because they're obsessed with uncovering new facts, not synthesizing them. NBC News spent an entire day bragging about the fact that Andrea Mitchell reported the John Edwards veep pick an hour and a half before the campaign announced it. But such "accomplishments" pale alongside the perceptual errors that come from an addiction to campaign-trail reporting. The national press corps spent the better part of 1999 and 2000 insisting that George W. Bush was a centrist, because he kept repeating slogans that suggested as much. Reporters could have avoided this misinterpretation had they spent less time following Bush around the country and more time sitting at their desks doing Nexis searches, where they could have unearthed old Bush quotes like this one from 1996: "The Republican Party must put a compassionate face on a conservative philosophy." Surely that would have told them more about how Bush was actually planning to govern than the number of times he described himself as "compassionate" or was filmed with black or Hispanic children.

PART OF THE PROBLEM IS THAT JOURNALism terminology glorifies "shoe-leather reporting," whereby you pound the pavement so often you wear out the soles of your shoes. Yet there's no widely used term of approbation for the other kind of reporting. For this very reason, my NEW REPUBLIC colleague Franklin Foer and I decided a few years ago to coin a phrase: ass-welt reporting. It means you've sat in your chair for so long reading books and documents that you've worn a welt the shape of your backside into your chair. I'm not saying that every news story could be reported without leaving one's desk. (Bernstein: "Woodward, look! I found a clip from 1971 in which President Nixon tells the *Omaha World-Herald* he plans to order his goons to break into Democratic headquarters in the Watergate Hotel!" Woodward: "I'll cancel that meeting with Deep Throat.") I'm simply saying that, sometimes, laziness can be the better part of valor.

CASE IN POINT. EARLIER THIS YEAR, *The Washington Post Magazine* published an interview with "Meet the Press" honcho Tim Russert. The premise was that the *Post* would give Russert a dose of his own medicine, ambushing him with his own quotes. The reporter cleverly juxtaposed Russert's deferential interview with President Bush alongside his snarling interview with Howard Dean. But Russert was ready, saying he had "a sense you may have asked this." The surprised *Post* interviewer interjected, "You researched the possibilities of my question in advance?" Russert then explained, "When you called 'Meet the Press' and asked for the Howard Dean transcript and the George Bush transcript, I said, 'I see where he's going.' " The lesson here is that ambush interviews work better when you don't ask the guy you're ambushing for the incriminating quotes in advance, especially when they could be found by a 30-second Nexis search. Indeed, I see this incident as a case study in the need for reporters to avoid human contact unless absolutely necessary. It's my expert grasp of such journalistic skills that no doubt led my editor to conclude I was far too valuable to send to Boston.

JONATHAN CHAIT

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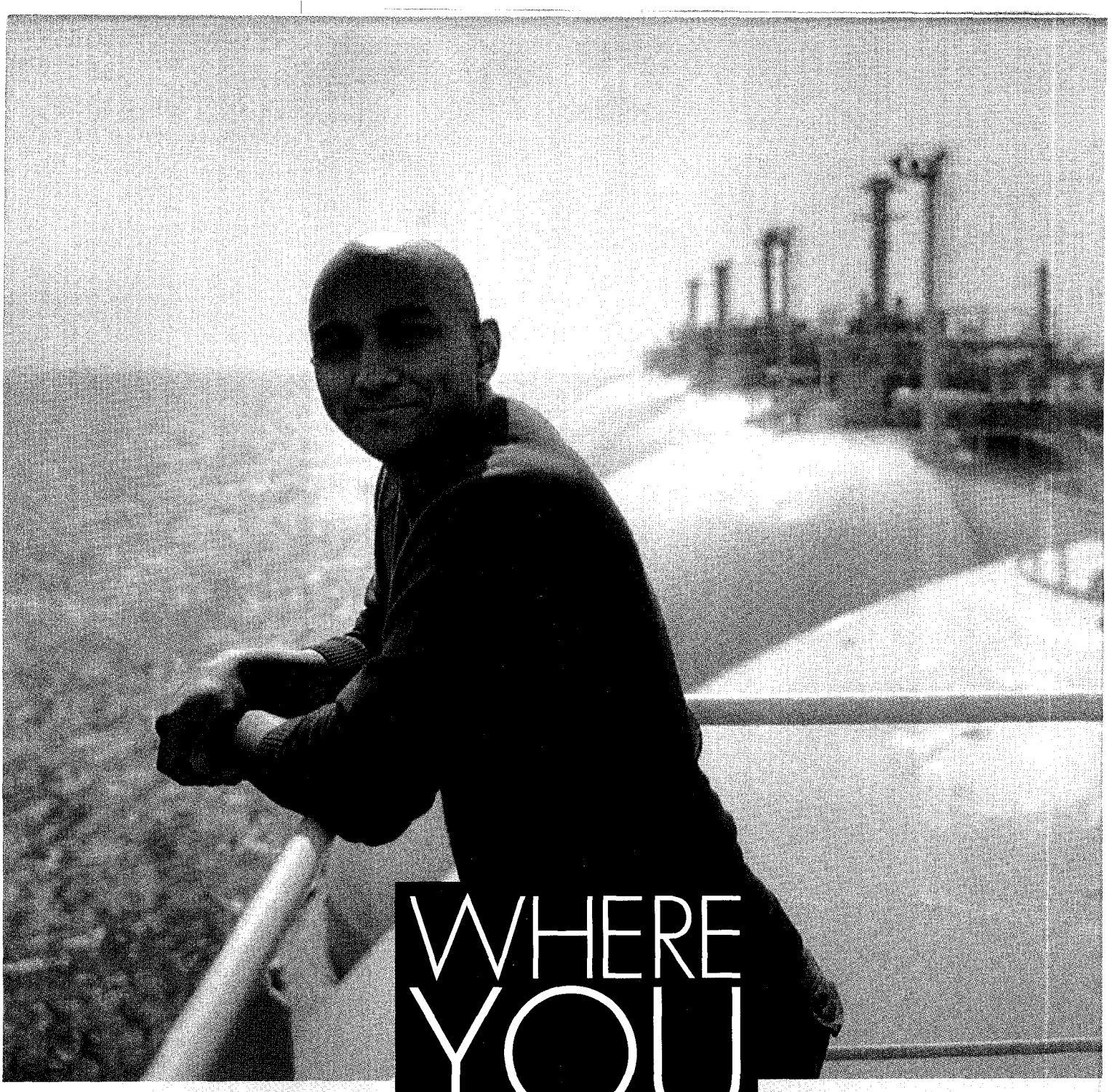

WHERE YOU DEMAND WE SUPPLY.

Behind Sam Singh, master of a Shell G Class tanker, sit 135,000 cubic meters of liquefied natural gas (LNG). On deck, it's a balmy 77°F. In the insulated LNG containers, it's minus 260°F. Sam's tanker is just one in our specialized fleet that carries over nine million tons of LNG around the world every year. They bridge the gap between places like Brunei, Oman and Nigeria, with an abundance of natural gas, and markets with a rapidly rising demand like the U.S. We have been investing in our LNG operations for over 40 years. Now these efforts are paying off handsomely. Within 10 years, the number of our LNG plants will have doubled. So too will the number of countries we supply. Why? Because by 2025 gas, the cleanest fossil fuel, could well have overtaken oil as the world's predominant source of energy. Developing and connecting the gas markets of the world is an increasingly crucial business in which no one matches our expertise and commitment. And if people like Sam have anything to do with it, no one ever will. Visit www.shell.com/lng to find out more about our Gas & Power business.

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